

THE WORKS OF VALENTIN KATAEV

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis, 'The Works of Valentin Kataev', has been composed by me and is my own work.

Signed: _____
Robert Russell

Date: 27 August 1978

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PREFACE

The transliteration system used in this dissertation is that recommended in British Standard 2979:1958, with diacritics omitted. The only exception to the transliteration system is where a name ending in a soft sign is followed immediately by an English apostrophe, e.g. Gogol', but Gogol's.

Short quotations (up to five words in length) have been transliterated. Longer quotations are given in Cyrillic. (However, where several short quotations are used together they are regarded as a single quotation and cited in Cyrillic.)

The great majority of the references to Kataev's works are to the second collected edition, Sobranie sochinenii v devyati tomakh (M., 1968-72). Such references are marked in the text in the form (2,112). Where the place of publication is Moscow or Leningrad this is given in the abbreviated form M. and L. respectively. A few dates are given in both Old Style and New Style in the form 16/28 January 1897.

In addition to published sources, this study makes use of two conversations which I have had with Kataev, in May 1971 at Peredelkino and in 1976 at the University of Keele, Staffordshire.

Two of my published articles make use of material presented in this dissertation. 'An Early Soviet Play at the Moscow Arts Theatre' concerns the production of Rastratchiki at MKhAT (see section 3.7.1 of the dissertation); and 'The

Problem of Self Expression in the Later Works of Valentin Kataev' is about mauvisme (see section 7.2.2 of the dissertation). The articles are listed in the Bibliography (p. 483).

I am grateful to Dr. M. Greene of the University of Edinburgh for permission to incorporate as an appendix a photocopy of the manuscript of a poem by Kataev which was found in Bunin's personal archive and is now in Dr. Greene's possession.

ABSTRACT

The career of Valentin Kataev (1897 -) spans the entire Soviet period, during which he has continued to write and publish topical works despite the many changes of political and literary climate. The aim of this thesis is to trace the evolution of Kataev's career from the beginning until 1969. The diversity of Kataev's work is most striking, but from an early date it contains two elements which are almost always present and which frequently pull in opposite directions. These are aestheticism and support for the Communist regime. In Trava zabven'ya (1967) Kataev implicitly links these elements with the two great influences on his work - the aesthete, Bunin, and the ideologically committed Mayakovskii. Kataev's uneasy position in Trava zabven'ya midway between Bunin and Mayakovskii reflects the most notable feature of his entire work.

His earliest work was lyric poetry written under Bunin's influence and characterised by clarity, concreteness and sensuousness. These qualities carried over into his prose, and Kataev's gifts are largely those of the poet rather than the novelist. In the 1920s he was a typical Fellow Traveller, writing both lyrical and satirical works. At the beginning of the 1930s he heeded warnings to change his style, and for thirty years wrote works which were politically acceptable but which reveal his 'Bunin' side intermittently. In the 1960s he surprised critics by writing modernistic works apparently quite unlike his earlier books.

But Svyatoi kolodets, Trava zabven'ya and Kubik are not entirely new; they recall features of the works of the 1920s. Whereas in the previous era the 'Mayakovskii' side had dominated, now, in the more relaxed atmosphere of the 1960s, the 'Bunin' side came once more to the fore, eclipsing but not extinguishing Kataev's protestations of support for the Soviet regime.

INTRODUCTION

0.1 Kataev's Career

Valentin Kataev was born in 1897 and began publishing stories and poems while still a young boy. He himself considers that his career as a professional writer began with the October Revolution of 1917.¹ At the time of writing there is every reason to believe that he is still actively engaged in literary work. (His latest tale - Almaznyi moi venets - appeared in Novyi mir in June 1978.) Kataev's career, therefore, embraces the entire period of Soviet literature together with a few years before the beginning of the Soviet period. During more than sixty active years Kataev has worked in many genres; he has produced novels, novellas, short stories, poetry, plays, film scenarios, journalism, fairy stories, even a pamphlet explaining the government's housing policy in the early 1920s.² Moreover, as the first editor of Yunost', he did much to encourage young authors and poets in the 1950s and early 1960s. In terms of quantity, therefore, his contribution to Soviet literature has been a considerable one. The second collected edition of his works runs to nine volumes, and many minor works are omitted.

As with almost all of his contemporaries, there is much in Kataev's work that is artistically inferior. Some

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1. V. Kataev, 'Avtobiografiya' in B. Brainina and E. Nikitina (eds.), Sovetskie pisateli. Avtobiografii, 2 vols (M., 1959). vol. 1, p. 538.
 2. V. Kataev, Novaya zhilishchnaya politika (M., 1922).

stories and novels of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s will undoubtedly stand the test of time, but many can already be seen to be uninspired pieces, written to order. With the exception of Vremya, vpered! and Beleet parus odinokii, Max Hayward's suspicion that Kataev's middle period was his worst turns out to be well founded.¹

Most of Kataev's articles and many of his artistic works reflect closely the precise historical moment when they were written. One of the most striking characteristics of his work is its topicality in Soviet literature; time and again he has adapted his themes and manner of writing to suit the prevailing literary and political climate,² so that when the atmosphere has been most repressive Kataev has managed to publish by suppressing unacceptable aspects of his talent. The result has been some inferior books. But in this respect Kataev shares the fate of those of his contemporaries who survived and continued to publish throughout the Stalin era. In the complete corpus of Fedin, Leonov, Erenburg, and many others are pages which the authors no doubt regretted. As with all those contemporaries mentioned, however, Kataev's creative output contains many works of a high artistic standard, and his contribution to Soviet literature has been significant in terms of quality as well as quantity. Rastratchiki, Vremya, vpered!, Beleet parus odinokii, Svyatoi kolodets, and Trava zabven'ya must be

1. M. Hayward, 'The Decline of Socialist Realism', Survey, 1972, No. 1, p. 87.
2. This aspect of Kataev's work has been criticised by B. Sarnov. See 'Ugl' pylayushchii i kimval bryatsayushchii', Voprosy literatury, 1968, No. 1, pp. 21-49.

considered important representatives of major trends in Soviet literature and satisfying works in their own right. Both as a barometer of the changing literary climate in the Soviet Union and as the author of some fine works, Kataev deserves to be studied.

0.2 Previous Major Work on Kataev

In the course of his long career Kataev's work has been the subject of many reviews and articles, and these will be referred to where appropriate. Of the longer published works by Soviet scholars, three deserve special mention. They are by Sidel'nikova (1957), Brainina (1960) and Skorino (1965).¹ All three authors exaggerate the extent of Kataev's allegiance to the Soviet regime in the early part of his career. (None of them, for instance, quotes from the autobiographical note of 1928 which reveals Kataev's ambivalence in the Civil War.)² As a result, they all see Kataev's development towards ideological conformity as parallel to his artistic development; the picture presented is, by and large, one of constant artistic improvement matched by increasing political awareness.

Nevertheless, despite this fault, all three books contain valuable information and interesting insight into

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1. T. Sidel'nikova, Valentin Kataev. Ocherk zhizni i tvorchestva (M., 1957); B. Brainina, Valentin Kataev. Ocherk tvorchestva (M., 1960); L. Skorino, Pisatel' i ego vremya (M., 1965).
 2. V. Kataev, 'Avtobiografiya' in V. Lidin (ed.), Pisateli: avtobiografii sovremennikov (M., 1928), pp. 175-7.

Kataev's work. Particularly notable in Sidel'nikova's book is the emphasis on Kataev's early poetry and its role in the composition of Khutorok v stepi. Of the three books Brainina's is the shortest and least informative, although her comments on style are sometimes incisive. Like Sidel'nikova, she gives insufficient weight to the works of the 1920s in comparison with those of the 1930s, although she does praise Otets and Rodion Zhukov. Skorino's is by far the most detailed published study on Kataev to date. By making use of little-known published material, such as articles in newspapers and journals, and by interviewing Kataev and several of his fellow writers, Skorino succeeds in evoking the atmosphere of Odessa in the first twenty years of the present century, of Kataev's Moscow circle in the 1920s, and of Magnitogorsk in the early 1930s. The chapters devoted to the later works are, by contrast, weak. As with the other books, Skorino's study was written before the publication of Svyatoi kolodets, Trava zabven'ya, and Kubik, and therefore it lacks the perspective on Kataev's career as a whole which those later works provide. Nevertheless, Skorino's work remains a valuable source, and the authors of all subsequent studies of Kataev have made extensive use of her book.

To date, no full length study on Kataev has been published in the West, although he is mentioned in the standard Western histories of Soviet literature, such as those by Struve, Slonim, and Brown.¹ The most detailed

1. G. Struve, Russian Literature under Lenin and Stalin (Norman, Oklahoma, 1971); M. Slonim, Soviet Russian Literature: Writers and Problems, 1917-1977 (New York, 1977); E.J. Brown, Russian Literature since the Revolution (New York, 1963).

Western studies are unpublished doctoral dissertations by J.F.M. Patron (Oxford) and W.G. Fiedorow (Indiana).¹

Fiedorow aims to show the way in which Kataev has adapted to the changing climate of Soviet literature, particularly to the demands of Socialist Realism. Patron's dissertation presents a balanced and informative general picture of Kataev's career and is particularly helpful in shedding light on the enigmatic work Kubik.

Of the many shorter studies, one will be mentioned here because of its pertinence to the method of the present dissertation, and also because its subject matter falls outside the scope of this dissertation and therefore it is not treated in the body of the work. In July 1976, when work on the present dissertation was already at an advanced stage, an article appeared in the emigre journal Kontinent which approached Kataev's tales of the 1970s from a broadly similar point of view.² Violetta Iverni's analysis of Fialka (1973) and Kladbishche v Skulyanakh (1975) leads her to conclude that Kataev's work contains two essentially opposite strands, and that by writing orthodox and politically acceptable stories such as Fialka Kataev is able to publish the purely personal, introspective work which really interests him, such as Kladbishche v Skulyanakh. Iverni allows for the possibility that Kataev's ambivalence might spring less from

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1. J.F.M. Patron, 'Valentin Kataev: A Biographical and Critical Study' (unpublished D.Phil. dissertation, University of Oxford, 1973); W.G. Fiedorow, 'Valentin Kataev vs. Socialist Realism' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Indiana, 1973).
 2. V. Iverni, 'Sotsrealizm s chelovecheskim litsom', Kontinent, 1976, No. 7, pp. 393-417.

cynicism than from a naive wish to reconcile the irreconcilable.

She writes:

Но самым главным в произведениях Катаева - ...
отчетливое непонимание автором того факта, что
эта его проза при всех реверансах в сторону
революции и советской власти как раз этой власти
чужда, враждебна и опасна! ¹

And again

Действительно ли он не видит и не понимает...
что нельзя одновременно служить и Богу, и
Маммоне? ²

In her polemical and openly anti-Soviet article Iverni touches on an aspect of Kataev's work which the author himself alludes to in Trava zabven'ya and which is discussed extensively in the present dissertation, namely the attempt by Kataev simultaneously to follow the examples of Bunin in artistry and Mayakovskii in ideology.

0.3 Aims of the Dissertation

The aims of this dissertation are twofold. Firstly, to provide a general picture of Kataev's literary career by analysing his significant works (and by discussing, where appropriate, the major changes in the Soviet literary climate which both affect and are reflected in Kataev's writing); and secondly, to demonstrate that the theme of Trava zabven'ya, namely that Kataev was influenced by two antithetical poets -

1. V. Iverni, 'Sotsrealizm...', p. 395.

2. V. Iverni, 'Sotsrealizm...', p. 417.

Bunin and Mayakovskii - and that he attempted to reconcile the lessons learned from both, can be traced through his career (although it is not, of course, present in every work).

The first of these aims dictates that the approach should be primarily chronological, so that the development of Kataev's career and its interaction with the changing social and literary conditions might be easily studied. There are three significant departures from this approach. The first of these comes in the section devoted to the 1920s, one of the most productive periods in Kataev's career. At this time his writing developed in parallel along two separate lines, the one satirical and the other non-satirical; consequently, these strands have been dealt with in separate chapters. Secondly, the chronological approach is abandoned in order to emphasise the links between two plays of the early 1930s - Million terzani and Doroga tsvetov - and the satirical works of the previous decade. Finally, in the section devoted to the 1960s, the common features of Svyatoi kolodets, Trava zabven'ya, and Kubik which Kataev calls mauvisme are dealt with together rather than separately with regard to each of the three works.

Turning now to the second aim, the clearest statement of the opposing influences on Kataev comes in Trava zabven'ya: 'У них у обоих учился я видеть мир - у Бунина и у Маяковского ...Но мир-то был разный.' (9,433) The lesson learned from Bunin was purely aesthetic, whereas that learned from Mayakovskii

was largely (though not entirely) ideological. For most of his career Kataev has striven to reconcile these two forces; at various times one has appeared to dominate at the expense of the other, but the struggle between the two has been a remarkably consistent feature of Kataev's work since the publication of Vremya, vpered! and even before. Of course, it must be admitted that to some extent all former Fellow Travellers who have published continuously since the 1930s have had to try to reconcile aesthetic and ideological demands. From all a degree of compromise has been necessary, and in this sense Kataev's case illustrates a larger problem.¹ But in the work of few other Soviet authors is the reader so conscious of the desire to integrate aestheticism and utilitarianism. Kataev is by temperament an aesthete, yet he is also temperamentally incapable of accepting the consequences of aestheticism in the Soviet Union of the 1930s and 1940s - not only the terrifying prospect of imprisonment and death, but even that of non-publication. Several contemporaries attest to Kataev's desire for recognition. Nadezhda Mandel'shtam, for instance, recalls that Kataev once said to Osip: '"Вот умрете, а где собрание сочинений? Сколько в нем будет листов? Даже переплести нечего! Нет, у писателя должно быть двенадцать томов - с золотыми обрезками!..."'² Yet to dismiss Kataev's claim to be a Soviet writer ('Я сын Революции. Может быть, и плохой сын. Но все равно сын.')(9,331) as cynical

1. For an interesting view of another case of compromise see A. Belinkov, Yurii Olesha: Sdacha i gibel' sovetskogo intelligenta (Madrid, 1976).

2. N. Mandel'shtam, Vospominaniya (New York, 1970), p. 298.

careerism is to exert too harsh a judgement. Over the years Kataev's protestations of loyalty to the Soviet regime have become more convincing, and a study of his work of the 1960s leads to the conclusion that he genuinely wishes to find a way of incorporating his aestheticism within the framework of Socialist Realism.¹

0.4 Scope of the Dissertation

In this study mention will be made of several aspects of Kataev's work, but attention will focus primarily on his prose, because it is here that his most important contribution to Soviet literature has been made. As a dramatist Kataev has had a checkered career, but he can certainly not be lightly dismissed.² However, it is the contention of the present author that only those plays which Kataev wrote in the second half of the 1920s and early 1930s can stand comparison with his better prose works. In this period the plays and satirical prose works complement each other; such comedies as Kvadratura kruga (1927), Million terzanii (1931), and Doroga tsvetov (1933) develop the themes and some of the devices of the satirical stories and form a central part of Kataev's work of these years. Because of the links between these plays and Kataev's satirical prose,

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1. See R. Russell, 'The Problem of Self Expression in the Later Works of Valentin Kataev', Forum for Modern Language Studies, 1975, No. 4, pp. 366-79. See also Chapter seven of the present dissertation.
 2. For a positive assessment of Kataev's dramatic work see M. Glenny, 'The Soviet Theatre' in R. Auty and D. Obolensky (eds.), An Introduction to Russian Language and Literature (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 271-85. Glenny suggests that Kataev is 'one of the few Soviet playwrights capable of writing sustained, unforced comedy'. (p. 281).

and also because of their high quality, the plays in question are discussed in the present dissertation. Of the other plays, only those which were of importance in the development of Kataev's career are examined. (Rastratchiki, for example, brought him into contact with the Moscow Arts Theatre; Avangard illustrated his attempts to carry out the injunction to write on industrial or agricultural themes.)

Kataev's poetry forms a relatively small proportion of his published work. The bulk of the poems in the final volume of the collected works date from his early years, but some were written in the 1940s and 1950s, indicating that Kataev never entirely abandoned poetry. It is the contention of the present writer that Kataev's poetry is of greater importance in the corpus of his work than previous critics have believed, and, consequently, the poetry is discussed in the first chapter. Kataev's poetry reveals clearly the influence of Bunin which was to play a significant part in his development; moreover, some of the qualities of Kataev's prose are more readily associated with poets than with novelists. His great strength lies in descriptive writing rather than narrative (although he can tell an exciting tale), in imagery rather than characterisation, and like a lyric poet, the hero of his best works is frequently a lyrical hero - a stylised version of himself. Kataev's interests lie less with the individuals and society around him than with himself and the physical world in which he lives. In this respect his prose resembles lyric poetry, and it must not be forgotten

that he began his literary career as a poet and a pupil of Bunin.

The scope of the present work, therefore, embraces Kataev's poetry, a few significant plays, and most of his prose works up to and including Kubik (1969). In a study of a living author who is still working some end point has to be chosen, preferably one which can be viewed in some perspective. In the case of Kataev Kubik appears to be the most suitable end point for a study at present, since it is now possible to reach fairly firm conclusions about his work of the 1960s. Thus far in the 1970s Kataev's work has shown considerable variety, but earlier trends have been continued, and it may be tentatively suggested that the conclusions reached about the 1960s could be extended to include the present decade.

CHAPTER ONE

Early Poetry and Prose

1.1 Biography, 1897-1917

Valentin Kataev was born in Odessa on January 16/28 1897. Petr Vasil'evich Kataev, the author's father, came from a clerical family in Vyatka and moved to Odessa in order to attend the Novorossiisk University. He was a good student, taking the silver medal in the History Department of the History and Philology Faculty, and was offered an opportunity to stay on at the University, but he preferred to begin work as a schoolmaster.¹ He was a cultured, widely read man who tried as best he could to instil in his sons a love of literature, especially of the nineteenth century Russian classics.

Kataev's mother, Evgeniya Ivanovna, came from the Ukraine. Her maiden name was Bachei (or, more correctly, Bachii) and she belonged to a family with strong military traditions. (Her father had served as a major-general.) Little is known of her beyond the fact that she had considerable musical ability. Unlike Petr Vasil'evich, who is represented in fictionalised form in many of Kataev's works, the author's mother figures rarely in his writings, for she died when he was six. In one of his published autobiographies Kataev writes: 'В 1902 г. родился мой брат Евгений, а через 4 месяца после этого мать простудилась и умерла от отека легких.'² Petr Vasil'evich never remarried,

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1. Petr Vasil'evich taught in the Odessa Military Cadet Infantry College and in a diocesan college for young ladies. See A. Bachinskii, L. Voskoboinikova, L. Latosheva, 'Yunost' pisatelya', Literatura i zhizn', 5 August 1962. (An article about the early years of Kataev's brother, the author Evgenii Petrov.)
 2. V. Kataev, 'Avtobiografiya' (1928).

but was helped to bring up his two sons by his wife's sister, Elizaveta Ivanovna Bachei.

At eight years of age Valentin Kataev entered the preparatory class of the Fifth Odessa High School (gimnaziya), and within a year he had begun writing verses. The summer of 1907 was spent in a cottage by the sea in Bessarabia, and Kataev completed ten poems during the family's stay there. During that same summer he first started writing prose, with a description of the village post office and of the moon rising over the sea.¹

In 1910 Petr Vasil'evich and his two sons took an extended holiday, visiting several European countries. This experience was to provide material for Kataev's novel Khutorok v stepi, written over forty years later.

The same year of 1910 proved important in Kataev's literary development, for in that summer he first met A.M. Fedorov (the father of a school friend) who was the central figure in an Odessan literary and artistic circle.² Fedorov read Kataev's poems, recognised in them a faint glimmer of talent, and introduced the young boy to the work of Bunin. Four years later Fedorov arranged for Kataev to meet Bunin in person when the famous writer was spending the summer near

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1. No conclusions can be drawn from such juvenilia, of course, but it is interesting to note that, even as a very young boy, Kataev attempted descriptive prose rather than narrative.
 2. This meeting, and the subsequent meeting with Bunin, are described in Trava zabven'ya.

Odessa.¹ It was a meeting which was to have a profound effect on Kataev, for in Bunin he found a literary master on whom to model himself.

Kataev's patriotic feelings, evident from some of his early verses, were enflamed by the outbreak of the First World War, and he could not wait to finish school before volunteering for the army. A letter of 13 August 1914 from Kataev to Bunin reads:

В виду того, что на этих днях я выезжаю из Одессы с санитарным поездом на театр военных действий, очень прошу назначить мне обещанный "осенний" день и час, дабы я мог с вами проститься и узнать ваше мнение о моих последних 5-6 вещах, в которых нет ни одного слова лжи. Из рекомендованных вами книг, ни одной не прочел по причине лени. Хотя надеюсь наверстать потерянное после окончания кампании.²

From 1915 until August 1917 Kataev served in the army and was concussed, gassed and twice wounded. During his years of military service he continued to write poems and short stories, and also wrote brief, impressionistic war despatches which were published in Petrograd journals as well as the Odessa newspapers in which he had published poems before the war. (His first published poem appeared as early as 1910.)

1. One of Bunin's rare diary entries for 1914 records that on 28 July he was at the Kovalevskii dacha near Odessa. M. Greene (ed.) Ustami Buninykh, vol. 1 (Dnevnik) (Frankfurt/Main, 1977), pp. 138-9.

It appears to have been a common practice for young writers to seek Fedorov's approbation. Vera Inber's experience almost exactly parallels Kataev's. She writes: 'Вскоре после окончания гимназии, летом, меня повезли к Александру Митрофановичу Федорову, нашей одесской знаменитости. Федоров жил на своей даче, у моря. Очевидно молодые поэты ему надоели до крайности; он всячески оттягивал чтение моих стихов. Наконец, я все же прочла про море. Он сказал: - Я хочу познакомить вас с Буниным.' V. Inber, 'Avtobiografiya' in V. Lidin (ed.), Pisateli..., p. 150.

2. Literaturnoe nasledstvo, vol. 84, Ivan Bunin (Book 2) (M., 1973), p. 461.

By a stroke of good fortune, Kataev was slightly wounded in the early stages of the offensive on the Rumanian front in June 1917, and, therefore, was spared the risk of death or serious injury in the later stages of that campaign. As a wounded officer (he held the rank of ensign), he was returned to Odessa for hospital treatment, and it was while he was in the Odessa Military Hospital that the October Revolution took place.

1.2 Poetry

1.2.1 Early Poetry, 1910-18

Kataev had begun writing verse at a very early age, but until his acquaintance with Bunin he imagined that poetry was something divorced from everyday life, that it consisted of set phrases and rhymes which could be learned. Bunin's description of a seagull, which was full of concrete, realistic details opened Kataev's eyes to new possibilities in poetry and set him off on a road, which he was to follow throughout his career, in search of absolute precision of description.¹

A study of Kataev's juvenile stories and poems reveals the process of maturation under Bunin's influence, and, in particular, the way in which the young poet increasingly turned to concrete, realistic detail capable of defining the specific nature of the object being described. However, Bunin's

1. Many years later Kataev was still able to recall his amazement on first hearing Bunin's poem. See Trava zabven'ya, 9, 263.

influence on his young pupil was not immediate and complete. Many of Kataev's juvenile poems lack specificity and the mark of genuine feeling. This is especially true of the verses written to order on conventional patriotic and religious themes rather than as a response to an observed scene or situation. 'Privet Soyuzu Russkogo Naroda v den' shestiletiya ego'; '12-i god'; 'V khrame'; 'K Tebe, Khristos' have no literary merit and are worthy of reproduction only as a contrast with those poems where Bunin's influence is discernible.¹ To this end one of the poems mentioned is quoted in full here:

К Тебе, Христос

В минуты горькие, в часы невольной грусти,
Неведомой тоски и тяжких сердцу дум
Мне образ Твой, Христос, является прекрасный,
И путь страстей, сомнений ежечасных
Уносится в туман, и мой светлеет ум.

Из терния венок в главу Твою впивался,
Но ясен все же был мне взгляд Твоих очей.
А светлый лик блаженно улыбался,
И мир в душе моей волною разливался,
Смирив поток умолкнувших страстей.

К чему стремимся мы смущенною душою?
Что ищем мы в житейской суете?
Ужель достигнем в шуме мы покоя?
Нет, беспокойный дух тогда лишь успокоим,
Коль припадем к Тебе, Христос, к Тебе.

These stanzas are clearly derivative; it would appear that the major influence here is neither Fet nor Maikov (whom

1. 'Privet Soyuzu Russkogo Naroda v den' shestiletiya ego', Odesskii vestnik, 1912, No. 5, p. 5.

'12-i god', Odesskii vestnik, 1912, No. 1, p. 2.

'V khrame', Odesskii vestnik, 1912, No. 9, p. 2.

'V khrame' (a different poem), Odesskii vestnik, 1912, No. 14, /p. 2.

'K Tebe, Khristos', Odesskii vestnik, 1912, No. 12, p. 2.

Fedorov detected in Kataev's verse),¹ but Bryusov and, perhaps, Lermontov. (The first line expressing bitter melancholy recalls Lermontov's 'I skuchno i grustno'.) There is not a single concrete detail in the poem, which is entirely based on generalised emotion (e.g. lines 11 and 12) and which illustrates the point made by Kataev in Trava zabven'ya that he once believed poetry could only be written on certain themes and in a certain 'poetic' language. Of course, it must not be forgotten that 'K Tebe, Khristos' was written by a youth of fifteen with very little personal experience to draw on. It is not surprising that his early attempts at verse should be derivative.

Several of Kataev's earliest poems are about nature, but they are devoid of the kind of detail which would convey a particular scene to the reader. Like the patriotic or religious verse, the stanzas about nature are inspired not by genuine experience but by literary models. Pushkin is clearly the model for the following poem entitled 'Osen':

Печальная пора природы увяданья!
Где красота пестреющих полей?
Где краски зелени твоей?

Печальная пора тревоги и страданья
Увяло все : и листья,² и цветы;
Любовь увяла и мечты.

The season, which is the ostensible subject, is merely equated with the conventional emotion of sadness.

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1. Kataev himself recalls Fedorov's assessment of his early verse. See L. Skorino, Pisatel' i ego vremya, p. 16.
 2. 'Osen', Odesskii vestnik, 1912, No. 17, p. 2.

A few poems from the very early adolescent period show the direction which Kataev's work was to take, namely the rejection of generalised emotion expressed in 'poetic' language in favour of an increasing awareness of the specific quality of material objects. Whereas the weaker verses published in 1912 are on patriotic or religious themes which are alien to Kataev, the more successful poems are concerned with nature and, in one notable instance, with domesticity. 'V starom dome' was written before Kataev met Bunin, and it anticipates the direction his work was to take under the tutelage of the great writer. As the poem has not been republished since its appearance in 1912 it is here quoted in full:

В старом доме

На ярких обоях лубки в золоченых багетах,
Кривые зеркала с следами бесчисленных мух;
Слой пыли не стертой на старых, как мебель, портретах.
На кафельной печке - из гипса, зеленый петух.

Везде занавески, чехол на облезлом рояле;
С геранью белой вазоны на низком окне;
Старательно вымытый пол, в этом крохотном зале;
На столиках лаковых, вазы стоят в стороне.

Здесь жизнь не кипит, здесь все чинно и сонно,
И изредка горе, иль радость сюда разглянет.
Лишь гулкое тиканье старых часов монотонно,
Несносно твердит, что бесстрастное время течет.¹

'V starom dome' is still clearly the work of a very inexperienced youth yet there are indications of the direction Kataev's poetry is to take. With the possible exception of the adjective 'oblezlyi' (shabby) there is no direct expression of the poet's

1. 'V starom dome', Odesskii vestnik, 1912, No. 59, p. 2.

attitude in the first two stanzas. The third stanza introduces the poet's emotional reaction to the interior scene which he finds empty and passionless. The word 'nesnosno' in the last line is superfluous and its inclusion is an indication of Kataev's lack of maturity at the time of composition, for the words 'gulko'e' (tikan'e) and 'monotonno' would have sufficed to convey more subtly the poet's attitude towards the old house.

L. Skorino quotes a different version of the first stanza of this poem:

На бледных обоях лубки в золоченых багетах,
Неровное зеркало с темными точками мух.
Нестертая пыль на старинных, как мебель, портретах,
На кафельной печке из глины зеленый петух.¹

Because Skorino gives no source it is impossible to say whether the version which she quotes is earlier or later than the version published in Odesskii vestnik.² In the main the differences between the versions are of little significance ('krivye zerkala' - 'nerovnoe zerkalo'; 'iz gipsa' - 'iz gliny'; 'sloi pyli ne stertoi' - 'nestertaya pyl'). Only one detail is strikingly different; the wallpaper is described as bright ('yarkie') and pale ('blednye'). One might conclude that this detail, at least, was not so much observed as imagined. 'V starom dome' is, in itself, a modest little poem which has

1. L. Skorino, Pisatel' i ego vremya, p. 20.

2. It seems a reasonable assumption that Skorino's version is later, because it is clearly superior. Pale wallpaper is more likely in an old house than bright paper; 'dark dots of flies' is much better than the vague 'remains of innumerable flies'. It is possible that Kataev may have rewritten the poem for inclusion in his collected works, and then decided to omit it. (See below for several examples of this type of reworking.)

not been reprinted in the collected works, yet because it provides evidence of the possible early influence of Bunin's work on Kataev it must be considered a significant step in his early development.

The poems written after 1914 were frequently submitted for Bunin's approval before publication. In Trava zabven'ya there is an account of how Bunin rewrote part of an early poem by Kataev called 'Tsvety na okne' - a description of Fedorov's studio. The version published in 1915 has not been reprinted and is reproduced here:

Цветы на окне

Безсолнечный, холодный, серый день.
С утра в саду туманно и тоскливо.
Блестит роса на мраморе ступень,
И осыпаются платаны сиротливо.

Гляжу в окно, и полосой свинца
Мне море кажется во мгле, за мысом дальним,
Природа ждет безропотно конца
И одевается багрянцем погребальным.

А на окне - последние цветы...
Их спас поэт в саду от ранней смерти.
Этюдники... Помятые холсты...¹
Да чья-то шляпа на мольберте.

The last stanza was written by Bunin as a replacement for Kataev's original version which read:

А в кувшине цветы,
Их спас поэт от раннего ненастья,
И вот они - остатки красоты.
Живут в мечтах утраченного счастья. (9,266)

Kataev's poem (as opposed to Bunin's stanza) is weak and vague, with several pathetic fallacies and few concrete details. Bunin's stanza is a model of concise, telling

1. 'Tsvety na okne', Probuzhdenie (Petrograd), 1915, No. 22, p. 717.

detail conveying in a few strokes the interior of Fedorov's studio. Many years later Kataev is still able to recall the effect on him of Bunin's swiftly composed verse.(9,266-7) It was precisely this kind of lesson which gradually improved Kataev's verse until a few of his poems earned the (not uncritical) praise of Bunin.

Some of the most successful of Kataev's early poems are from the cycle Stikhi s khutoroka written at the cottage which the Kataev family rented for the summer months and which was to provide the setting for such works as Rodion Zhukov, Beleet parus odinokii, and Khutorok v stepi. In the best poems from the cycle, such as 'Sukhovei' and 'Znoi' Kataev reveals a direct, genuine feeling for nature which contrasts strongly with the conventional sentiments expressed in earlier poems such as 'Osen'' ('Pechal'naya pora prirody uvyadan'ya'). 'Sukhovei' bears a dedication to Bunin, and in this as well as in its imitation of the great poet's manner it is an open avowal that Kataev considers himself a pupil.¹ Kataev's own emotions are present in 'Sukhovei' in words like 'grustno', 'unyloi' (cheredoi), 'radostno', 'zhelannoi' (burei), but they do not dominate the poem to the exclusion of realistic detail. 'Sukhovei' is a record of a particular scene which is well observed and imbued with genuine feeling.

The mood of 'Sukhovei' is recaptured in the poem 'Znoi':

В густом саду, слегка от зноя пьян,
Я шел дорожкой, поросшею павилиной.
Отец полел под вишнями бурьян,
И с корнем вырывал пучки ромашки дикой.

1. 'Sukhovei', Ves' mir (Petrograd), 1915, No. 26, p. 10.

Дышала медом яркая сирень,
 От зноя лоснилась трава перед покосом.
 Свистел скворец. И от деревьев тень
 Ложилась пятнами на кадку с купоросом.
 Блестящий шмель в траве круги чертил,
 И воздух пел натянутой струною,
 И светлый зной прозрачный пар струил
 Над раскаленною землею.¹

In this short poem, as in 'Sukhovei', the accuracy and economy with which Kataev is able to convey sense impressions represents a major step forward in his development. Perhaps the most striking feature of 'Znoi' is the way in which Kataev is conscious of all of his senses. Vision dominates, but hearing and touch (in the sensation of heat) are present. It could be argued that the sense of taste is missing, but there is an oblique reference to it in the words 'dyshala medom', which appeal simultaneously to smell and taste.

A simultaneous appeal to several or all of the reader's senses is one of the major features of Kataev's prose style at all stages of his career. One example, chosen at random, is the scene in Beleet parus odinokii where Gavrik opens the bottle of Fialka lemonade:

Бутылка выстрелила, но не грубо, как стрелял квас, а тоненько, упруго, деликатно. И тотчас прозрачная вода закипела, а из горлышка пошел легкий дымок, действительно распространивший нежнейший аромат самой настоящей фиалки.

Гаврик осторожно взял обими руками, как драгоценность, холодный, кипучий стакан и, зажмурившись против солнца, стал пить, чувствуя, как пахучий газ бьет через горло в нос. (5,103)

Most of Kataev's prose works contain similar passages where the material nature of an object or substance is conveyed by appealing simultaneously to several senses. Even as early as

1. 'Znoi', Ves' mir, 1917, No. 32, p. 16.

1915 in the poem 'Znoi' Kataev uses a device, or, rather, a method of description which is one of the constant features of his work.

Unlike the majority of Kataev's poems of 1914 and earlier years, 'Znoi' is devoid of philosophical reflections and self-conscious emotion. The first person pronoun is used once, but the poet concentrates on the physical sensation caused by the heat ('slegka ot znoya p'yan'). Moreover, the major figure in the poem is not the poet himself but his father at work in the garden.¹ In several respects, therefore, 'Znoi' serves as an example of the process of externalisation, the concentration on the surrounding world which was gradually replacing the conventional adolescent emotionalism of the very early verses.

It is one of the contentions of the present study that, largely under the influence of Bunin, the emphasis of Kataev's early verse shifted from his own emotions to the physical details of the surrounding world. However, the lyrical hero does not disappear completely. He is still present in poems like 'Sukhovei' and 'Znoi', and his moods and outlook on life continue to inform the verse, albeit indirectly, through the choice of detail. The melancholy mood of 'Iz dnevnika' (1917) derives partly from the direct expression of sadness ('grustno', mechtatel'no') and partly from the method of presentation of

1. A similar point could be made about many of the poems written after Kataev made Bunin's acquaintance. The first stanza of 'Vecher' is typical in this respect.

В монастыре звонят к вечерне,
Поют работницы в саду.
И дед с ведром, идя к цистерне
Перекрестился на ходу.

Ves' mir, 1915, No. 28, p. 17.

the scene which emphasises the poet's loneliness.

Из дневника

Сегодня у меня на подоконнике
Букет сирени яркий и простой.
На улице играют на гармонике
И слышен чей-то голос молодой.

Мне грустно, я один. Смеркается.
В прохладных комнатах сиреневая тишь,
Весь двор в тени. Но солнце отражается
Еще на черепице алых крыш.

Хрипит гармоника хрипливо и старательно,
Свободно песня льется по двору.
И отчего мне грустно и мечтательно -
От песни ли, от дум - не разберу.¹

If 'Iz dnevnika' is compared with 'K Tebe, Khristos' it will be seen that, while the mood of melancholy is common to both, the later poem is more restrained, with the emphasis as much on the senses as directly on the emotions. As in 'Znoi' there is a conscious attempt to involve several senses simultaneously which is particularly noticeable in the synaesthetic phrase 'sirenevaya tish'.

'Iz dnevnika' is exceptional among the poems of 1917 and later years in its melancholy. The rather self-indulgent sadness of earlier years gives way gradually in Kataev's verse to a buoyant optimism and belief in the goodness of life which is paralleled in the short stories of the Civil War period. 'Zvezdnaya sonata' contains a stanza which sums up the cheerful mood of most of Kataev's poems from 1915 onwards:

Лицо, как жар, горит от холода,
Просторно, радостно в груди,
Что все вокруг светло и молодо,
Что столько счастья впереди.²

1. 'Iz dnevnika', Ves' mir, 1917, No. 33, p. 31.

2. 'Zvezdnaya sonata',
Ves' mir, 1915, No. 9, p. 15.

Or again, from another poem:

Дышать легко. И сердце жизни радо.
И все равно куда и как идти,
Мне в этот вечер ничего не надо,¹
Мне в этот вечер все равны пути.

During Kataev's early adolescence the melancholy mood of his verse was almost invariably accompanied by a certain religiosity (see, for instance, 'К Тебе, Khristos'). The religious overtones do not disappear from Kataev's verse until several years after the Revolution but they do become more muted and more closely associated with the poet's sense of the wonder of nature, as in the following lines:

И я молюсь. Земле. Воде. Камням,
Траве, пьянящей солнечным цветеньем.
Мерцанью звезд...²

1.2.2 The First World War and Kataev's Poetry

His period of service in the First World War inevitably affected both the tone and the subject matter of Kataev's poetry (and his prose, which will be dealt with later in this chapter). During the early months of the war Kataev contributed patriotic verses to the Odessa newspapers which are very similar to their prewar counterparts such as '12-i god'.³ After a few months at the front Kataev's changing view of war is reflected in the more sober poems published in 1916 in the journals Ves' mir and Probuzhdenie.

'Poslednee pis'mo' is a dramatic little poem in which a soldier's last letter to his parents reaches their home

1. 'Vecher' ('Sineet nebo laskovo v zenite'), Ves' mir, 1917, No. 32, p. 19.

2. 'Sonet', Ves' mir, 1918, No. 15, p. 15.

3. '1915 god', Odesskii listok, 5 Jan. 1915. 'Rus' (stansy o voine)', Ves' mir, 1915, No. 1, p. 21.

after they have received news of his death.¹ In 'Nochnoi boi' the horror of a battle fought at night is conveyed by means of a few details of sound and light.² The mutilation of Kataev's beloved Russian landscape brings a sombre tone to 'Tuman vesennii steletsya':

Мечтаю. Думаю. Брожу среди развалин
Разбитого снарядами села,
Повторены зеркалами проталин
Остатки хижин, выжженных дотла.

Стволы берез с отбитыми ветвями,
Меж них прямые остовы печей,
Зола и мусор серыми буграми,³
Да груды обгорелых кирпичей.

Yet although Kataev is affected by the destruction of man and the mutilation of nature, his essential optimism frequently prevails over the darkness of war. In 'Pis'mo' he juxtaposes love and war, with the result that war seems distant and unreal when compared with the letter from his sweetheart:

Мне было странно, что война,
Что каждый день - возможность смерти,
Когда на свете ты одна,
Да милый почерк на конверте.⁴

'Pis'mo' contains a good example of Kataev's use of detail to paint an entire scene. All that has to be said about the war is captured in the way that light strikes the bayonets of the marching men.

В лесу, среди простых крестов,
Пехота мерно шла рядами,
На острых кончиках штыков
Мигало солнце огоньками.

1. 'Poslednee pis'mo', *Probuzhdenie*, 1916, No. 3, p. 84.

2. 'Nochnoi boi', *Ves' mir*, 1916, No. 13, p. 16.

3. 'Tuman vesennii steletsya', *Ves' mir*, 1916, No. 11, p. 14. See also 'V puti', *Ves' mir*, 1916, No. 11, p. 14.

4. 'Pis'mo', *Ves' mir*, 1916, No. 9, p. 16.

Kataev emerged from the experience of war a mature man and an accomplished writer, especially in prose. His youth and his cheerful philosophy of life acted as a counterbalance to the horrors he had witnessed, as evidenced by a stanza from the poem 'U orudiya' in which, despite the trenches and the guns, the poet experiences peace and even joy as he stares at the sky and recalls the girl he loves:

Я счастлив оттого, что путь идет полями,
И я любим, и в небе Млечный Путь,
И нежно пахнут вашими духами,¹
Моя рука, и волосы, и грудь.

1.2.3 The Poems in the Collected Works

All of the quotations from Kataev's poetry used thus far have been taken from the versions of the poems printed in Odessa and Petrograd newspapers and journals during the years 1912-1918. Several of the poems referred to were republished in the Collected Works but this edition, while it is undoubtedly more convenient, was not used as a source for the present study because Kataev, who made the selection himself, edited his youthful poems, changing individual words, lines, and even entire stanzas. It is instructive to examine the changes made in order to see where the experienced writer judges his juvenile work to be unsatisfactory.

Whenever a word is so obvious as to form a near cliché it is omitted in the revised version. Thus the line: 'Skvoz' uzor zelenykh sosen' becomes: 'Skvoz' igolki temnykh sosen'.²

1. 'U orudiya', Ves' mir, 1916, No. 12, p. 18.

2. 'Tishina', Ves' mir, 1915, No. 37, p. 10 and Collected Works, 9, 551.

Nothing is lost in the change since the word 'sosna' suggests to the reader the notion of green. In the new version the particular shade of green is specified. A similar change occurs in the lines:

Но солнце низкое, сквозь яркую листву
Уже струит лучей вечерних нити.

which become:

Но солнце низкое, сквозь пыльную листву
Уже струит лучей вечерних нити.¹

The substitution of 'pyl'nuyu' for 'yarkuyu' adds a new, appropriate detail to the evening scene and thereby helps define the quality of the light, which 'yarkuyu' obscured.

In a few cases the meaning remains essentially unchanged but a detail which is not strictly accurate is removed:

Туман весенний стелется. Над лесом
Поплыл, курясь, прозрачный синий дым.

becomes:

Туман весенний стелется. Над лесом
Поплыл, курясь, прозрачный сизый дым.²

Or again: 'Elovyi les sinel v tumane' becomes: 'Elovyi les stoyal v tumane'.³ In both of these examples the original choice of colour is somewhat recherche, and accuracy is sacrificed for effect.

A further example of this type of change occurs in 'Znoi': 'Dyshala medom yarkaya siren' becomes: 'Mindal'no pakhla zharkaya siren'.⁴ The somewhat precious use of 'dyshala' in the meaning of 'to smell' is rejected in favour

1. 'Vecher' ('Sineet nebo laskovo v zenite'), Ves' mir, 1917, No.32, p.19 & Collected Works, 9, 550.

2. 'Tuman vesennii steletsya', Ves' mir, 1916, No. 11, p. 14 & Collected Works, 9, 555.

3. 'Pis'mo', Ves' mir, 1916, No.9, p.16 & Collected Works, 9, 553-4.

4. 'Znoi', Ves' mir, 1917, No.32, p.16 & Collected Works, 9, 548.

of the more accurate 'pakhla'. The change from 'medom' to 'mindal'no' is partly explained by the fact that 'pakhla' requires a trisyllabic modifying word (although another reason is probably that the later version is less hackneyed). Similarly the change from 'yarkaya' to 'zharkaya' removes a hackneyed adjective and at the same time underlines the main theme of the poem, namely heat.

In one final example of this type of change an inaccurate adjective, 'serebryanyi', and a cliché, 'tonkoi lentoi', are both omitted:

Путь не долг. Тонкой лентой светит
Под водой серебряный песок.

becomes:

Путь не долг. Серебристо светит
Под водой у берега песок.¹

A different category of changes is those occasioned not by a false detail or a cliché but by an emotional note which now seems out of accord with the poem as a whole. The third stanza of the sonnet 'Nad morem oblaka polzut' reads:

А после целый день до вечера мечтать
Я буду, на часы глядеть и медленно томиться.
Когда же в первый раз во тьме блеснет зарница.²

The edited version bears the title 'Iyul' and shows a major change in the stanza quoted:

А дома - крепкий чай, раскрытая тетрадь,
Где вяло начата небрежная страница.
Когда же первая в окне мелькнет зарница.(9,539)

The change which Kataev has made in this stanza is very similar to the one proposed by Bunin for Kataev's early poem 'Tsvety na okne' in that lines expressing an abstract

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1. 'Molodost'', Ves' mir, 1915, No. 30, p. 17 & Collected Works 9, 544.
 2. 'Nad morem oblaka polzut, kak glyby mela', Sovremennyi mir (Petrograd), 1918, No. 1, p. 18.

thought or an emotion have been replaced by a few well chosen physical details which paint a picture of the poet's room. The mood of langour and melancholy in the first version was not appropriate in the poem as a whole; it did not, for instance, accord with the second stanza:

Холодная струя охватывает тело,
Щекочет грудь и хлещет по спине,
А солнце с высоты печет. Но любо мне,
Что кожа на руках, как бронза, загорела.

Even 'Sukhovei', which was dedicated to Bunin and is clearly written in imitation of his style, contains a stanza in which the young poet has succumbed to the temptation to include a direct reference to his emotions:

Подсолнечник сломало под окном,
И грустно мне весь день глядеть из ниши,
Как по ветру летает над гумном
Пучок соломы, вырванной из крыши.¹

In the later version changes are introduced which make the stanza more like the rest of the poem:

Подсолнечник сломало за окном.
Дымится пылью серая дорога,
И целый день кружится над гумном
Клочок соломы, вырванной из стога.(9,545)

1.2.4 Thematic Links between Poetry and Prose

The most obvious link between Kataev's poetry and his prose consists in the fact that several of the principal features of Kataev's prose, such as precise description of physical objects and natural phenomena or the simultaneous appeal to several senses, are already present, at least to a limited extent, in the early poetry. However, the link

1. 'Sukhovei', Ves' mir, 1915, No. 26, p. 10.

between poetry and prose is not restricted to such features. Many of the themes and incidents from the prose works have their counterparts in the poetry.

In some cases a minor detail from one of the poems is taken up and expanded in a novel or story. In other cases, such as the novel Khutorok v stepi, more extensive use is made of the early poetry which is worked into the text of the novel. The present brief discussion of the thematic links between verse and prose will follow the order of composition of the poems concerned.

Khutorok v stepi draws heavily on the cycle of poems entitled Stikhi s khutorka as well as the earlier verses inspired by the journey to Western Europe undertaken by the Kataev brothers and their father in 1910. In some cases the poems are translated into prose and incorporated into the novel in their entirety. As an example the poem 'Znoi' should be compared with the following extract from the novel: 'Первый, кого он увидел, был отец. Василий Петрович полел под вишнями бурьян и вырывал с корнем наиболее упорные кустики желтой ромашки.' (5,477) The way in which Kataev's early verses are incorporated into Khutorok v stepi will be discussed more fully in a later chapter.

'Kapli' (1917), expresses the idea that a tiny raindrop both reflects and contains the whole world:

В каждой капле, что сверкает в распутившихся кустах
Блещет солнце, светит море - небо в белых облаках.

В каждой капле столько моря! Искры солнечной игры.
Хорошо быть светлой каплей и таить в себе миры.¹

1. 'Kapli' (first and last couplets), Ves' mir, 1917, No. 34, p.8.
A slightly different version appears in Collected Works, 9, 561.

Fifteen years later Kataev returned to this theme in the novel Vremya, vpered!, in which the raindrop is used almost as a crystal ball. The world reflected in the raindrop is changing so rapidly that it appears to be chaotic; yet the person looking into the raindrop ought to be able to see past the immediate chaos of Magnitostroi to the future when the construction is complete.

Of all the poems reproduced in the collected works the one which seems to mean most to Kataev is entitled 'Kassiopeya' (1918).(9,562) This tentative suggestion is based on the fact that it has been incorporated in its original form into three different works spanning a period of thirty-three years. It is quoted in its entirety in the lyrical short story More (1928),(1,356-61) which is imbued with poetry and makes use of several early poems, both directly as with 'Kassiopeya', and indirectly, as with the sonnet 'Pri svete zvezd besplotny nashi litsa'.¹ 'Kassiopeya' recurs in Katakomby where it is attributed to Petr Vasil'evich Bachei:

Петр Васильевич вспомнил, что когда-то, очень давно,
в его жизни уже была такая же темная августовская,
а может быть, и сентябрьская ночь. И тогда он
любил...

В воде, как золотые змеи
Блестят огни Кассиопеи... (6,500)

Finally, in Zimnii veter the scene alluded to in Katakomby is described more fully and the poem is quoted in full.

The image of blind fish which exerts a powerful fascination for Kataev in such works as Rodion Zhukov and Za vlast'

1. 'Pri svete zvezd besplotny nashi litsa', Ves' mir, 1918, No. 15, p. 15.

Sovetov occurs for the first time in his work in the poem 'Slepye ryby' (1920). (9,575) Fresh water fish are driven by a storm from the Danube to the sea where they are blinded by the salt water and then stranded behind sandbanks as the tide recedes. The plight of the eponymous hero of Rodion Zhukov, driven by events on board the battleship "Potemkin" to leave his native land, is similar to that of the blind fish which he sees at the mouth of the Danube and which are used as a symbol of his own despair. Notable among the other poems which anticipate themes and incidents from prose works are 'Kiev' and 'Rasskaz' (both 1923) (9,603 and 606), inspired by the brief, passionate love affair described in one of the best of Kataev's short stories, Zimoi; and 'Ballada' and 'Pyatyi' (both 1925) (9,607-9 and 610-12) which deal with the revolutionary events of 1905.

Kataev's poetry forms a minor part of his work, both in terms of quantity and quality. As a poet he never achieved the accuracy of epithet and the limpidity of his best lyrical prose, nor the vigour and humour of his stories and novels. Yet although the poems are comparatively weak in execution they do contain the seeds of much that is essentially Kataevan and in the context of his work as a whole they repay study. In the gradually increasing accuracy of physical description and the attempt to stop the flow of time by capturing in words the essence of a particular experience Kataev's poems reflect one very important aspect of his prose which has been present in his work in varying degrees throughout

his career, and which is one of the principal lessons learned from Bunin. Moreover, by providing a microcosm of the themes and preoccupations of the author's work the poems help to demonstrate the underlying unity of a long and apparently diverse literary career.

1.3 Early Short Stories

The best of Kataev's early short stories date from the 1920s, but a few of the stories written in the previous decade are of interest in four main ways: a basically optimistic outlook and love of life which triumphs over momentary despair; an insight into the psychology of children; an ear for convincing dialogue; and, finally, that precision of description which was learned from Bunin and which is the major feature of Kataev's poetry.

Kataev's first published story, written when he was fifteen years old, is entitled Probuzhdenie.¹ Not unnaturally, considering the author's age, the story is immature and almost entirely derivative; nevertheless it illustrates the presence at the very beginning of Kataev's career of the optimistic belief in the innate goodness of life which later underlies his stories of the 1920s and indeed, in one form or another, much of his life's work. The hero, Raskolin, returns to Moscow and then Odessa after a period of imprisonment and exile in Siberia imposed for his part in the 1905 revolution. It appears that the experience of exile has broken his spirit

1. V. Kataev, Probuzhdenie (Odessa, 1912). This story was published as a separate volume by N.F. Skarlato.

vlast' Sovetov were both attacked for their insignificance, for concentrating on minor points instead of the major issues of industrialisation and the defence of Odessa respectively. From the very beginning of his career Kataev has been attracted more by the details of day to day activities than by such things as military and industrial campaigns. Even Vremya, vpered!, which might appear at first sight to contradict this assertion, depicts the construction of Magnitogorsk through the everyday details which preoccupy the novel's heroes. Beating the record becomes a kind of game, almost a part of the gambling theme which runs through the novel. Thus the First World War sketches laid the foundation of an important aspect of Kataev's work. Kataev himself emerges from the sketches as a highly intelligent, observant reporter capable of writing in spare, muscular prose about the actual experience of warfare. It is clear that at this stage of the war, at least, Kataev is not appalled by what he sees; indeed so diverse are the experiences and so colourful are the people with whom he is living that he obviously enjoys the life he is leading and, in particular, the opportunity to express as accurately as possible the many new impressions which crowd in on him.

The soldiers whom Kataev depicts have a zest for life, an ability to adapt to any conditions, and above all a quiet dignity which both impresses and moves the reader (nowhere more so than in 'Soldaty uchatsya gramote'¹ in which illiterate soldiers painstakingly write messages to their wives by copying

1. Pochti dnevnik, pp. 22-5.

letter by letter, or 'Tak umiraet russkii soldat'¹ which tells simply and without sentimentality of the death of a soldier and the confusion and misery of his friend). Yet the soldiers themselves did not like to be the subjects of sketches by a young war correspondent, especially since Kataev did not disguise the identity of the men he was writing about.²

Besides the brief sketches from the Front, Kataev also wrote short stories while in the army. Zemlyaki (1916) (1,72-75) is a highly dramatic, anecdotal story set in a peasant's hut which is being used as a temporary field hospital. Three of the patients are forced to listen to a fourth boasting of his successes with women. Later it transpires that the men come from the same district and that one of them is the husband of a woman seduced by the storyteller. Zemlyaki is a slight story dependent upon a melodramatic situation, yet it successfully combines several of Kataev's strengths as a writer. The atmosphere of boredom and sickness is conveyed in a few brief strokes. Despite its brevity the tale is carefully constructed, with the entry of the 'fel'dsher' serving to delay the climax and to focus attention on the very sick man who turns out to be the husband. The major virtue of Zemlyaki is undoubtedly the author's mastery of colloquial direct speech which, in this case, is similar to Zoshchenko's without ever going over into stylisation as Zoshchenko does. The central character

1. Pochti dnevnik, pp. 38-43.

2. See V. Kataev, 'O granitse, razdelyayushchei zhanry', Literaturnaya gazeta, 28 October 1934.

condemns himself through his own speech, his shallow ignorance and egoism being revealed without direct intervention on the part of the author. The final paragraph of the story could be considered superfluous, since it reveals the feelings of the deceived husband, but without it the story would have been altogether too melodramatic. (It may be argued that it is so, even as it stands.) With the final paragraph it becomes clear that there will be no drama, no attempted murder, just sickness and despair.

Noch'yu (1,76-91) written in 1917 but not published until 1934 for reasons which will be discussed, confirms Kataev's growing mastery and maturity. His earlier chauvinism and enjoyment of the adventure of war is here replaced by fear and disgust. The main protagonists are not heroic defenders of Russia, or even the quiet, dignified men of a sketch like 'Tak umiraet russkii soldat'; they are lost, confused and frightened soldiers wandering blindly in search of their unit and terrified lest they meet an enemy patrol. The narrator who, like his companion, is unwashed, smelly and uncivilised, is tormented by memories of his peaceful, happy life before the war when he ate icecream, went fishing, played tennis and listened to Chaikovskii's 1812 Overture at a symphony concert. In his recollection the strong, beautiful notes seem to take on colours and textures which fill him with delight and make him long for the pre-war world. But suddenly he becomes aware of the falseness of his romantic notion of war; Chaikovskii's music seems despicable in that it glorifies something which, in reality, consists of dead

bodies, lice and dirt. The narrator of Noch'yu does not suddenly renounce his former way of life to become a revolutionary. He still longs for the world of icecream and tennis which he knew before the war; yet he is not unchanged by his experiences, for he now realizes that romantic illusions about war as well as anything which serves to promote them are both foolish and dangerous. Noch'yu was written in 1917 while Kataev was recovering in hospital from the wound received in the summer offensive of that year. The author sent it to the journal Ves' mir but it was suppressed by the Provisional Government censorship, presumably because of its gloomy, realistic view of war, and appeared in print only in 1934. The story synthesises the lessons which Kataev had learned in his articles and poems. It is specific, written from personal experience, realistic. Yet, important as it is, Soviet critics have overemphasised its place in Kataev's early work by ignoring contemporary stories such as Baraban and A + B v kvadrate which are lightweight compared with Noch'yu, but which are as accomplished technically and are perhaps more characteristic in tone and theme.

Baraban (1917) (1,92-103) which is autobiographical, dating from Kataev's short period in the Odessa Infantry Academy in the spring of 1917, is a lightly ironical, amusing tale about a young officer who pretends that he can play the drum in the military academy band so that he can get an extra free hour per week and also for the glory of carrying the drum on parade. Baraban is remarkable for a combination of elements which were to recur in later works. The hero, Petrov, is one

of the excessively vain, romantic dreamers of whom Petya Bachei is the best-known example. His pride and vanity are almost childish, and at the prospect of leading the band, and thereby the regiment, his sense of reality is completely overwhelmed by his ego. Yet one smiles indulgently and even affectionately at Petrov as at his successors, for in the characterisation of this largely autobiographical figure there is a warmth and gentle self-irony which is disarming. While Petrov is conducting a love affair and struggling to learn the art of playing the big drum, political events are moving swiftly. The February Revolution comes as a total surprise to the apolitical Petrov, who is cocooned from reality by the military academy and by his all-absorbing love affair. The pattern of the tale with its merging of an absorbing private experience and a wider background of social events foreshadows similar features in Beleet parus odinokii and, especially, Zimnii veter.

Petrov is the hero of another short story, dating from the same period, entitled A + B v kvadrate. (1,112-23) On the eve of his departure for the Front he goes for a walk with his current sweetheart and the story consists largely of the dialogue between them. Petrov alternately reveals his feelings and disguises them behind an exasperating mask of flippancy and irony. He teases Vera with a question about $A + B$ squared at moments when she expects a declaration of love. In the ambivalent relation between the lovers, in the young man's defensive screen of irony, in his struggle to retain the upper hand in the duel of love, and finally in the

excellent dialogue there is much in common with works as far apart in time as Vesennii zvon (1916) and Zimnii veter (1961). The thought which preoccupies both Petrov and Vera, namely that he might be killed, is suppressed for most of the story behind the facetious conversation, but in the end the young hero expresses it, thereby resolving the tension in the story and at the same time winning conclusively the duel with Vera.

Two early stories which may be taken as complementary to each other and which are of considerable literary and biographical interest are Vesennii zvon and Svyatki u pokoinikov (which dates from 1918), of which only the former appears in the collected works. The hero of Vesennii zvon (1,51-64) is a twelve year old, romantically-inclined boy, a bookish dreamer living in a state of highly charged emotion. He wallows in the bitter-sweet love of adolescence (a love which is based on his reading rather than on genuine knowledge of and feeling for the girl concerned). Tanya is the vague focus round which he weaves his dreams; she is an instrument whereby he manufactures the sweet, self-indulgent melancholy that he so enjoys. Yet the author's ironical attitude to his hero does not diminish the force of the emotion which the boy experiences. It merely calls into question its source. The boy's jealousy and the guilt he feels after informing on a friend are sensitively observed. While Kataev explores the nature of adolescent love (a theme to which he was to return several times), the fundamental tone of the story is by no means sombre or melancholy. Indeed, in the mixture of lightly ironical authorial attitude, acute sensitivity to the nuances

and the absurdities of the speech of young people and the undertow of lyricism the story strikes a note which is to be taken up and developed in Beleet parus odinokii and in other works. It is interesting to note that the experiments in the use of multi-sense impressions in order to define an experience through its various aspects, which are seen in Kataev's verse of this period, here finds a counterpart in prose:

В городе шумно и возбужденно-весело. Стучат экипажи. Хрипят и кашляют автомобили, зеркальной зыбью начисто блестят вымытые и протертые витрины магазинов. Кричат газетчики. А кое-где на углах уже продают по гривеннику маленькие букетики нежных парниковых фиалок. Пахнет духами и морским туманом. Весь день гуляет тяжелый, опьяняющий ветерок и ласково закрывает людям ресницы. (1,53)

In Svyatki u pokoinikov¹ the hero is the same boy, only a little older. The rather strange title refers not to the deceased, but to the inhabitants of a district of Odessa to which Kataev gives the fictitious name "Pokoi" (the name of the district was actually "Otrada", which is used in Vesennii zvon). There is no special significance in the pun except that the titles of Kataev's stories or chapters in his longer works are not infrequently puns or literary references. (As an example one might quote the chapter from Khutorok v stepi in which a horse is given the name Chinovnik solely, one imagines, in order to engineer the chapter title 'Smert' Chinovnika'.) The story is simply an account of a Christmas holiday during which Valya, the autobiographical figure, and his friends stage a play. The interest, as with the earlier

1. V. Kataev, 'Svyatki u pokoinikov', Ves' mir, 1918, No. 7, pp. 2-9.

story is partly biographical in that the details of Valya's home and family correspond to what is known about Kataev's early life and to many portraits in later works. Valya himself is as bookish and fanciful as in the earlier story. When plans are being made for the entertainment, he proposes to recite Chatskii's monologue from Gore ot uma. After difficulties in obtaining a curtain are resolved the show is a success and is followed by traditional New Year celebrations including the old superstition of writing down a wish and then burning the paper before the clock strikes midnight. As in the earlier case of Probuzhdenie, Kataev is comfortable when handling such private domestic scenes and, largely for this reason, both Vesennii zvon and Svyatki u pokoinikov are successful stories. Both indicate some of Kataev's strengths as a writer (his ear for dialogue, his carefully modulated self-irony, his limpid, lyrical descriptive passages) and, implicitly, some of his weaknesses (his relative lack of inventiveness, his hasty characterisation of adult figures). Perhaps the most interesting feature of both stories is the shifting point of view, which was to become one of Kataev's distinguishing marks. While being ostensibly first-person narratives, both stories are in fact narrated by the author refracted through a more youthful version of himself. This mode of narration is achieved by alternating between a vocabulary and intonation characteristic of a young boy and a more adult style. The effect is that the author is able to identify with his young alter ego (and enlist some sympathy for him) and simultaneously point to his pretensions, thus

achieving the mixture of warmth, humour and irony which informs many works.

Two stories of 1918, Chelovek s uzlom (1,124-28) and Muzyka (1,129-134), reveal Bunin's influence at this time.¹ The hero of the former story is a young soldier on guard duty who spends his time thinking of the girl he loves and the beauty of the night sky. He is a dreamer and a poet (one paragraph of the story describing the stars closely resembles Kataev's poems 'Zvezdnaya sonata' and 'Kassiopeya'). While he is dreaming a thief breaks into the storehouse and, after failing to stop when challenged, is almost killed by the young soldier. Only the fact that he forgot to load his rifle prevents him from shooting the thief. At the end he is badly shaken by the thought of how near he was to being a killer. As in the poem 'Pis'mo', war is pushed into the background by the author's more pressing preoccupation with love and nature, only to break suddenly and violently through the web of poetic daydreams spun by the young hero. Bunin's influence tells in descriptive passages such as the following clipped nature description from the end of the story: 'Солнце уже успело подняться, и море под ним горело розовым серебром. Сарай, сады, дачи, были теплого телесного цвета, а на земле лежали длинные влажные холодные тени.' (1,128) One important detail appears to be borrowed directly from Bunin's Legkoe dykhanie (1916). As in Bunin's story a girl expresses her love by taking off a scarf and covering the man's face with it. The scarf smells sweetly of her hair and through its thin

1. When it first appeared in the Odessa journal Ogon'ki, 1918, No. 28, Chelovek s uzlom bore a dedication to Bunin.

silk the whole world appears lilac. Kataev's hero is particularly sensitive to smells and colours because of the heightened awareness which love lends him.

Bunin himself appears as a character at the end of Muzyka. The story is once again a very simple account of a domestic scene. (The significance of this at a time of Revolution and Civil War is considerable; Kataev, like his mentor, stands aside from the conflict and is concerned with purely aesthetic problems.) On a hot summer afternoon the narrator is left to look after a little girl whose mother has gone swimming. His attempts to amuse and teach her, the dialogue between them and his tender, half-exasperated attitude towards her are very similar to features of Dorogoi, milyi dedushka, a story written forty seven years later.(1,547-58) The 'music' of the title has a double significance. Firstly, it refers to the child's confident assertion that she can draw music by scribbling a few strokes on a paper; secondly, a parallel is provided by Bunin, who comes visiting at the end of the story, for he also confidently conveys music and sound through his acute awareness of the precise nature of every individual sound and his unerring ability to choose the right word or an apt comparison. Kataev's description of Bunin is both an expression of his admiration for the older man's talent and an attempt to equal him in acuteness of observation and precision of description. Yet, despite the affectionate tone in the description of Bunin, there is a note of irony in the passage which indicates an ambivalence towards the great writer. The passage concerned is of great importance in Kataev's work

as a whole, especially with regard to the works of the 1960s, and is quoted here:

Это Иван Алексеевич. Частые нляксы лиственной тени косо и быстро бегут по его полотняной, ладно выглаженной толстовской блузе сверху вниз. На его поскрипывающих и похрустывающих столичных штиблетах желтый порошок цветущего бурьяна. В руках - толстая палка. Борода приподнята. Пенсне заложено в боковой нагрудный карманчик. Гордый горбатый нос и внимательно прищуренные глаза.

Я знаю, Иван Алексеевич долго бродил по степи, по обрывам, любовался морем, купальщицами, пароходным дымом. Он, несомненно, заметил, что поверхность моря похожа на синюю шагреню, а подводные камни просвечивают сквозь воду, как черепаховый гребень. Все это прекрасно, но вдруг быстрый, звенящий, поющий, ноющий, грохочущий, стеклянный, скрежущий шум проносится за оградой трамвая наполняет сад. Иван Алексеевич останавливается. Зеркальный сухой блеск трамвайных стекол вспыхивает за пыльной изгородью туй, как магний, и летит по стволам через сад, пересчитывая весь его кудрявый инвентарь. И вослед ему долго коет проволока.

Иван Алексеевич стоит и слушает. Лицо его крайне озабочено. Я знаю, о чем он думает. Он думает, на что похож этот длинный, музыкальный, такой типичный, но ни на что не похожий звук потревоженной трамвайной проволоки. На хроматическую гамму? Может быть. На виолончель? Возможно. (1,133-34)

At a time of national upheaval Bunin and his pupil are concerned to find the precise comparison for a sound, in other words theirs is a purely aesthetic concern. Several years later in the story Zolotoe pero Kataev once again makes Bunin a central character in one of his stories but his changing attitude results in a highly ambivalent portrait of the older author.

1.4 Concluding Remarks

The poems and stories which Kataev wrote before 1920 are, with the possible exception of Noch'yu, lightweight, but their importance in the corpus of his work has consistently been underestimated by critics. The first, and most important point about the early poems and stories is the evidence which they provide of the influence of Bunin and of Kataev's natural affinity with him. Enough has been said on this matter in the present chapter to indicate how crucial it is as a formative influence on Kataev's career. The three principal areas of influence are: precision of description; multiplicity of sense impressions; and a predominantly aesthetic preoccupation even at a time of great social change. Although the First World War did much to mature Kataev it did not fundamentally alter his attitude. Noch'yu is exceptional among the works of the period in the seriousness of its subject matter and the predominance of a social theme over commonplace themes and aesthetic effect, both of which are more characteristic of Kataev.

Stories such as Baraban, A + B v kvadrata and Svyatki u pokoinikov are of considerable biographical interest and their major contribution to Kataev's work lies in the portrait of the proud, childish, sensitive hero, drawn from the personality of the author himself. The ability to maintain an ironical attitude towards his autobiographical figures remained one of Kataev's major assets. Moreover the works named introduce 'n@sobstvenno-pryamaya rech'', the particular narrative mode to which Kataev resorts throughout his career.



CHAPTER TWO

Non-Satirical Works of the 1920s

2.1 Biography 1918-30

2.1.1 The Civil War Years

Odessa in 1918 was no doubt a better place to live than cities such as Moscow and Petrograd, which were in the grip of a Civil War that was inexorably moving south. Nevertheless, even Odessa was beset by rampant inflation and extreme political uncertainty, which gave rise to many rumours.¹ In these circumstances it is perhaps surprising to learn that the many young poets and writers who lived in the city spent much time in organised reading and discussion of literature. Strange as it may appear, in 1918 the enormous difficulties facing the inhabitants of Odessa seem to have been less important to the young poets of the city than purely aesthetic matters. As one participant in the literary meetings recalls:

В Одессе и вообще на юге в 1918 году была весьма любопытная и сложная обстановка. Вся жизненная накипь - белогвардейские кутежи, спекуляции и хищничество - все это было нам глубоко чуждо. Наши интересы были иными. Мы занимались поисками новых стихов - о Рылееве, Баратынском, Языкове и многих других, узнавали друг от друга, главным образом и прежде всего от Эдуарда Багрицкого. Знаменитый Александровский парк в Одессе, заросший, дикий, - мы там сидели и читали стихи, или бродили по бульварам, уходили к морю, мечтали о будущем, о творчестве.²

The society formed by the young poets of Odessa to give themselves a public forum for their work was, perhaps not surprisingly, called Zelenaya lamp - a reference to the

1. For a picture of Odessa in the Civil War years see the diaries of Vera Nikolaevna Bunina which brilliantly convey the atmosphere in the city. M. Greene (ed.), Ustami Buninykh, pp. 177-348.
2. B. Bobovich in conversation with L. Skorino, quoted in Skorino, Pisatel' i ego vremya, pp. 108-9.

famous group of the same name in which Pushkin had taken part. The first meeting of the Odessa literary circle took place in September 1917 and the society flourished until the spring of 1919.¹ Prominent among its members were Olesha, Kataev, Shishova, Adalis and, possibly, Bagritskii.² Meetings took place either in a private flat or, when the society grew larger, in the Conservatory or University. Bobovich has written of the society:

Два слова о "Зеленой лампе", душой которой были Багрицкий, Олеша, Катаев, Шишова, Адалис. Собирались мы обычно в квартире "бразильского консула" Мунца, сын которого так же был членом "Зеленой лампы" и писал застенчивые новеллы. А почему его папа называл себя "бразильским консулом", будучи коренным одесситом, оставалось для нас навеки неразрешимой загадкой. Наши выступления происходили в зале консерватории или, чаще, в восьмой аудитории юридического факультета.³

At one meeting Kataev, wearing his officer's uniform and still suffering from the effects of gas, read his 'Trisneta o lyubvi'. Dolinov, who was present on that occasion, recalls that Kataev was greeted with respect as someone who had already published poems in the Odessa newspapers.⁴

1. G. Dolinov, 'Vospominaniya ob odesskom literaturno-khudozhestvennom kruzhe "Zelenaya lampo"' (unpublished manuscript quoted by L. Skorino, Pisatel' i ego vremya, p. 103).
2. Bagritskii certainly attended Green Lamp meetings, but there is some doubt whether he was actually a member. Bobovich lists him among the members (see note 3), whereas Kataev recalls that he attended meetings occasionally but never belonged to the group. (Kataev in conversation with Skorino, Pisatel' i ego vremya, p. 104.)
3. Untitled contribution by B. Bobovich to O. Suok-Olesha and E. Pel'son (eds.), Vospominaniya o Yurii Oleshe (M., 1975), p. 25.
4. G. Dolinov, 'Vospominaniya...', quoted in Skorino, Pisatel' i ego vremya, pp. 103-4.

After the demise of the Zelenaya lampa circle, the same group of poets formed the core of a new society called the Kollektiv poetov which served a similar purpose. At its meetings poets like Kataev and Olesha read their works and subjected each other to criticism.

At the beginning of June 1918 Bunin and his wife arrived in Odessa to escape from Soviet Russia. They remained in the city until January 1920. Almost as soon as they arrived, Kataev called on them, renewing the friendship which had begun in 1914.¹ During the year and a half which Bunin spent in Odessa, Kataev was a frequent visitor at his home. He often asked the older writer to comment on a poem or story which he had written, and Bunin would do so - sometimes criticising harshly, but generally praising his young pupil. Vera Nikolaevna has left a picture of Kataev as he appeared to her in the summer of 1918:

Я искоса посматриваю на Катаева, на его темное, немного угрюмое лицо, на его черные, густые волосы над крепким невысоким лбом, слушаю его отрывистую речь с небольшим южным акцентом. Он любит больше всего Толстого, о нем он говорит с восторгом, затем Чехова, Мопассана, Флобера, Додэ, но Толстой и Пушкин выше всех, недостижимы... Он очень неглупый и хорошо чувствует поэзию. Пока он очень искренен.²

But although much of Kataev's time in 1918 and 1919 was spent writing and thinking about literature and visiting his mentor, it was almost impossible not to be involved in the Civil War. Kataev's brief autobiography of 1959 makes no

-
1. Vera Nikolaevna Bunina's diary records that Kataev called to see them on 30 June/13 July. The content of the diary entry makes it clear that this was not the first time he had called. M. Greene (ed.), Ustami Buninykh, p. 179.
 2. M. Greene (ed.), Ustami Buninykh, pp. 180 and 188.

mention of his activities in 1918. Of the Civil War Kataev here says only: 'В 1919 г. я был мобилизован в Красную Армию и некоторое время исполнял обязанности командира батареи во время боев на линии Лозавая - Полтава.'¹ In his 1928 autobiography, however, he paints a more complex picture of his activities during the Civil War: 'Гражданская война 1918 - 1920 гг. на Украине замотала меня в доску, швыряя от белых к красным, от контр-разведки в чрезвычайку. В общей сложности за это время в тюрьме я просидел не менее 8 месяцев.'²

Vera Nikolaevna Bunina's diary adds some detail to the picture of Kataev's Civil War activities. Her account leaves no doubt that Kataev served as an officer in the Volunteer (White) Army. She recalls that when she complained to Fedorov about the way Kataev had behaved at a meeting of writers and artists - he had shouted that he stood for Soviet power - Fedorov laughed and replied: 'Жаль, что не было меня на заседании, - я бы ему при всех сказал: скидывай штаны, ведь это я тебе дал, когда нужно было скрывать, что ты был офицером...'³ A few days later Vera Nikolaevna wrote: 'Вот придет Катаев, я его отругаю так, что будет помнить. Ведь давно ли он разгуливал в добровольческих погонах!'⁴

1. V. Kataev, 'Avtobiografiya' (1959), p. 539.

2. V. Kataev, 'Avtobiografiya' (1928), p. 176.

3. M. Greene (ed.), Ustami Buninykh, p. 238.

4. M. Greene (ed.), Ustami Buninykh, p. 241. The meeting at which Kataev, Olesha, and Bagritskii shouted down Bunin and proclaimed themselves 'for Soviet power' took place on 29 March/11 April 1919. It has been referred to twice by Kataev (in 'Zapiski o grazhdanskoi voine', 8,20-21; and in Trava zabven'ya, 9,327 - in the latter case the reference is to Olesha's description of the incident) and once by Bunin, Sobranie sochinenii v devyati tomakh (M., 1965-67), vol. 9 (1967), p. 429.

After his brief spell in the Red Army in 1919, Kataev worked as a journalist for Yug ROSTA in Odessa.

Затем меня отозвали из армии и я был назначен заведующим окнами сатиры в одесском РОСТА. В общем, в одесском РОСТА я делал то, что делал Маяковский в Москве в РОСТА. Писал тексты для агитплакатов, частушки, лозунги, листовки, выступал в устных газетах и т.д.¹

One of his duties while working for the Odessa branch of ROSTA was to visit outlying villages in order to recruit some of the local inhabitants. It was while engaged in this work in 1920 that he had the narrow escape from death at the hands of a band of terrorists, which he describes vividly in Trava zabven'ya.²

The following year Kataev moved to Khar'kov, where he continued to work for ROSTA (this branch was known as Ukr ROSTA), producing slogans and captions for propaganda cartoons. He also wrote a 'heroic drama' entitled Osada, which received just one performance.³ It was a period which he was to look back on with nostalgia as 'a uniquely wonderful time', despite the fact that he often had to go hungry.⁴ The editor of Kommunist - one of the newspapers for which Kataev worked - was Sergei Ingulov, a committed Communist who constantly exhorted his young colleagues to write from a Bolshevik standpoint. It was under Ingulov's stern editorship that Kataev published his satirical portrait of Bunin in the story Zolotoe pero. His stay in Khar'kov was brief, however, for at the

1. V. Kataev, 'Avtobiografiya' (1959), p. 139.

2. In the 1959 autobiography he writes: 'Неоднократно меня посылали в деревню для организации селькоровской сети, один раз меня даже захватила банда Заболотного, и я чудом спасся от смерти.' (p. 139)

3. L. Skorino, Pisatel' i ego vremya, p. 165.

4. See the autobiographical story Chernyi khleb, 1, 428-35. See also Krasivye shtany, 2, 24-31.

beginning of 1922, after the death of his father which took place the previous year, Kataev moved to Moscow. Nadezhda Mandel'shtam recalls that Kataev was determined to take the capital by storm. 'Забавный и живописный оборванец, Валя Катаев, предложил мне пари: кто скорее - я или он - Завоеюем Москву.' ¹

2.1.2 Moscow in the 1920s

When the turmoil of the Civil War years began to settle and the way of life under NEP got under way, scores of provincial journalists, poets and authors made their way to Moscow, drawn by the prospect of national fame after the years of literary starvation. Sholokhov came from the Don region; Bulgakov from Kiev. From Odessa came a number of authors who were to make an important contribution to Russian literature in the 1920s - Olesha, Bagritskii, Il'f, Petrov, Inber and Kataev as well as many of lesser stature.²

For many of the young aspiring authors, journalism provided the means of staying alive while they awaited the publication of their literary work. Soon after his arrival in Moscow, Kataev began writing satirical sketches for the newspaper Trud. At about the same time he met Nadezhda Krupskaya, who invited him to write some pamphlets for the Political Education Department which she headed and, as a result, he wrote 'O novoi zhilishchnoi politike', an explanation

1. N. Mandel'shtam, Vtoraya kniga (Paris, 1972), p. 85.

2. Of course, Babel' also came from Odessa, but he did not come straight to Moscow in the early 1920s as an unknown provincial writer in the way that the others did.

and justification of the government's housing policy. A journalist and author who knew Kataev well in the 1920s has written of this particular piece of work: 'Беспечное отношение к своему таланту приводило Катаева к любым его растратам. Он был очень доволен, когда в самом начале нэпа написал и опубликовал брошюру "Новая жилищная политика".'¹

Krupskaya introduced Kataev to the novelist Serafimovich, who was preparing to launch a new journal entitled Novyi mir and who was looking for an editorial secretary. Kataev got the job and published in the journal two of the stories which he had brought with him from Odessa. But it was a short-lived job, for the journal ceased publication after only two issues and Kataev moved to the newspaper of the railway and water transport workers - Gudok.

Despite its origins as a specialist newspaper catering for a particular type of worker, Gudok enjoyed an enviable national reputation and circulation in the 1920s. In 1927, for example, it sold 400,000 copies daily and provided employment for 500 correspondents.² It was here, at Gudok, that the young writers who had migrated to Moscow from Odessa and Kiev found work. Olesha wrote a daily satirical verse under the pseudonym "Zubilo" (and achieved enormous popularity); Bulgakov contributed short, satirical sketches; Olesha and Il'f worked in the so-called chetvertaya polosa section, answering readers' letters in their witty verse. Kataev

1. I. Kremlev, V literaturnom stroyu (M., 1968), p. 203.

2. See L. Kroichik, 'O nekotorykh zakonomernostyakh razvitiya sovetskogo fel'etona' in Revolyutsiya, zhizn', pisatel' (Voronezh, 1969), pp. 73-88.

contributed many verse and prose sketches under a number of pseudonyms, including "Starik Sabbakin", "Mitrofan Gorchitsa", "Oliver Twist" and "Tovarishch Rashpil'".¹ Every afternoon, after handing in their copy, the contributors had to remain in the building in case they were required for corrections. The young Odessans would gather in one of the offices and try to outdo one another in wit. A participant in these duals recalls that it was fun, but it could be wounding, for they did not spare one another. Examples of mistakes or infelicities of style were copied out and pinned on a notice-board for public amusement and censure.²

During these years (1922-8) the shortage of living accommodation in Moscow was particularly acute. Many of the young writers at Gudok had to live in crowded dormitories or, at best, share one of the corridor-like cells into which the large rooms of old houses were divided by means of thin plywood partitions. In these circumstances Kataev was indeed fortunate to have a two-roomed apartment on Myl'nikov Lane, where those who lived in less private and spacious accommodation gathered in the evenings to read and criticise each other's work.

Thus, in the 1920s Kataev established himself as a satirical journalist and as one of the many talented Fellow Travellers living and working in Moscow.

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1. See I. Masanov, Slovar' psevdonimov russkikh pisatelei (M., 1960), vol. 4, p. 223 for a list of Kataev's pseudonyms.
 2. A. Erlikh, 'Oni rabotali v gazete', Znamya, 1958, No. 8, p. 170.

2.2.1 Works of the Civil War Period

As he had done during the First World War, Kataev made notes of his impressions during the Civil War, most of which he spent in Odessa, and in 1920 he used these as the basis for an account of the period entitled 'Zapiski o grazhdanskoi voine'.¹ The work is a fairly brief sketch, the purpose of which is to convey the atmosphere of confusion in Odessa in 1919. In places, Kataev attempts to describe the major events of the year much as a historian would do, and some of the principal historical figures in the campaign - Denikin, Ataman Grigor'ev, General Franchet d'Esperet, General d'Anselme, and the governor of Odessa, Grishin-Almazov - are mentioned. But the historian's view of the events of 1919 is secondary to the details, minor characters and incidents which attracted Kataev's attention. Thus 'Zapiski o grazhdanskoi voine' leaves the reader with only a vague idea of the principal events of 1919 in Odessa but with a very clear sense of the atmosphere in the city.

Kataev's account is written from a point of view sympathetic to the Reds and occasionally his description of the city under White rule takes on a note of obtrusive rhetoric, as in the following sentence: 'Это был самый беззащитный, самый развратный, трусливый и лжновоевропейский тыл.' (8.9) Nevertheless, such unambiguous rejection of the Whites is somewhat belied by the author's obvious appreciation of the colourful foreign elements introduced

1. Published only after Kataev moved to Moscow. Zhizn', 1924, No. 1. Republished in the collected works (8,7-39).

by the Civil War into an already colourful city: 'По улицам маршировали живописные патрули британской морской пехоты, возбуждая восторг мещанок своими кирпичными лицами и синими беретами.' (8,7)

Two details in particular attract Kataev's attention, namely the presence in the streets of flower sellers and money changers, both of which recur in several later works, notably in the description of Odessa under Rumanian and German occupation in Za vlast' Sovetov. Here, as elsewhere in Kataev's works, it is the unusual and incongruous detail which catches the author's eye.

The style of 'Zapiski o grazhdanskoi voine' is, for the most part, straightforward and vigorous, with short, unambiguous sentences and restrained use of imagery. It provides a highly effective vehicle for the fast moving reportage, as in the following typical example:

На следующий день совершенно неожиданно в двенадцать часов стало известно, что город в течение двух суток будет сдан красным.

Еще без четверти двенадцать беспечная толпа фланировала мимо цветочниц и валютных лотков, а в двенадцать по городу покатались мальчишки-газетчики, размахивая крыльями экстренных телеграмм. Все было очень точно и определенно: город отдается без боя. Французское правительство отзывает свои войска во Францию. Без иностранной поддержки добровольцы не смогут удержать город. (8,15)

A few somewhat unusual images stand out in the generally plain style of the work and these probably pleased Kataev, since he used them again in other stories written at about the same time. For example, the metaphor 'serye utyugi frantsuzskikh bronenostsev' recurs in V osazhdennom gorode

(1920) and in Rab, which, although written as late as 1927, recalls the mood of the Civil War stories. It must be emphasised, however, that images such as the one quoted, while they may be extremely common in Kataev's short stories of the 1920s, are exceptional in the factual 'Zapiski o grazhdanskoi voine', the simple, somewhat bald style of which is characteristic of Kataev's later journalistic work, such as the pamphlet 'O novoi zhilishchnoi politike'.

The importance of 'Zapiski o grazhdanskoi voine' lies in its relationship to Kataev's short stories of the Civil War such as Opyt Krantsa and V osazhdennom gorode. The factual sketch reveals the atmosphere of the besieged city with its political uncertainty and moral torpor, awaiting the invasion as a day of judgement, and it is this confused city which acts as the setting and the unifying factor in Kataev's important series of Civil War stories.

Kataev's first major story to be published was Opyt Krantsa, written in Odessa in 1919 and published in Moscow in 1922. It illustrates most of the principal thematic and stylistic features of Kataev's work of this time.

The hero of the story, a mathematician named Krantz, wishes to prove that he is capable of rejecting or overcoming the emotional, irrational side of his nature and of acting in accordance with rational principles. To this end he proposes to win a vast sum at the gambling tables and then to continue his life as before, unaffected by wealth. The other major character, a poor actor called Zosin, is present in the gambling

hall when Krants wins the first part of his fortune and learns that Krants does not propose to make use of the money. Infuriated by the contrast between the student's unwanted wealth and his own poverty, and goaded by desire for the actress Klement'eva who can be bought only with a large sum of money, Zosin decides to kill Krants and steal his gold, but finds that he is incapable of murder. After two successful evenings Krants returns for a third attempt at the tables and this time loses everything. If his view of his own character had been correct he would have been unmoved by his loss, but the brief possession of wealth has released unconscious forces in Krants and he stumbles from the table in a state approaching delirium.

In Trava zabven'ya Kataev recalls an occasion on which he read Opyt Krantsa to Bunin in the autumn of 1919. He claimed that in the story he was attempting to apply Bunin's principle of symphonic prose. Bunin, however, was not impressed by this point, and replied: 'Я уже здесь не вижу себя. Вы уходите от меня к Леониду Андрееву.' (9,330) It is indeed difficult to see the influence of Bunin on Opyt Krantsa, which, when compared with earlier stories and poems, appears to be a departure from the model of Bunin's work. Besides Leonid Andreev, the obvious influences on Opyt Krantsa are Pushkin's Pikovaya Dama and Dostoevskii's Prestuplenie i nakazanie. However, in view of the fact that Kataev claimed to have been influenced in Opyt Krantsa by Bunin's symphonic style it is important to examine what he meant by this term. Fortunately, Kataev himself has commented on the word "symphonic" as applied

to Bunin's style. In an interview with Skorino he said:

'Важным у Бунина я считаю и симфонизм стиля. Бунин учил меня видеть, слышать, нюхать, осязать, учил ритму прозы.'¹

Kataev's view that the rhythm of the prose is the main factor in the symphonic style is supported by the following passage from Trava zabven'ya in which he quotes from a conversation with Bunin who said:

Главное же, что я здесь, в "Господине из Сан-Франциско", развил, - это в высшей степени свойственный всякой мировой душе симфонизм, то есть не столько логическое, сколько музыкальное построение художественной прозы с переменами ритма, вариациями, переходами от одного музыкального ключа в другой - словом, в том контрапункте, который сделал некоторую попытку применить, например, Лев Толстой в "Войне и мире": смерть Болконского и прочее. (9, 312)

Bunin's words, as quoted by Kataev, are extremely important for Kataev's own work of the late 1960s, particularly for Kubik, but it would seem that if they apply to Opyt Krantsa then it is only marginally. The only sign of a contrapuntal principle is the tension between the two major characters, the one cold and rational, the other fevered and irrational, which is then resolved at the end of the story by the revelation of Krants's own irrationality. To a certain extent the rhythm of the prose varies in accordance with whichever principal character is dominant. For example, in the opening passages describing Krants the rhythm is smooth, the sentences fairly long by Kataev's normal standards, and use is made of the

1. L. Skorino, Pisatel' i ego vremya, p. 19.

device of grouping adjectives in threes, thus adding to the rhythmic effect.

Некий молодой человек по фамилии Кранц, студент-математик, белокурый, коренастый малый с коротким, твердым немецким носом, костистым упрямым лбом и широко расставленными глазами, больше всего на свете любил чистую математику и от жизни ничего не ждал: ни хорошего, ни дурного. Любил он математику потому, что ее простая, сложная и точная философия очень хорошо подходила к его привычкам, взглядам на мир, и с нею ему было очень удобно жить на свете. (1,135)

This passage may be compared with the following description of Zosin in which the occasional use of very short phrases breaks up the rhythm, adding a staccato effect which is appropriate for the character's state of mind:

Зосина лихорадило. На сцене было холодно, и от поднимаемых и переставляемых декораций, от занавеса и из зрительного зала дуло ветром. А за кулисами, в уборных, было крепко натоплено. Налориферы потрескивали от жару, пахло масляной краской, и к ним нельзя было притронуться. От этого кружилась голова. (1,138)

While several such passages do appear to substantiate the view that the rhythm of the story has been carefully considered, there can be no comparison with Gospodin iz San-Frantsisko, because Kataev does not consistently maintain the contrapuntal tension between the rhythms associated with Krants and Zosin and because, as a young writer, he does not have Bunin's skill in handling subtle changes of rhythm. Nevertheless, although there can be no case for claiming a close link between Opyt Krantsa and Bunin's work it is significant that while Kataev is experimenting with prose style in an attempt to find his own natural mode he should have Bunin's prose in mind as a model. The importance

of other features of Bunin's work on Kataev's development have already been mentioned in the previous chapter and to them must now be added a concern, albeit as yet superficial and unsubtle, with rhythmic variation.

It would be a mistake to neglect Kataev's limited attempt to apply the principle of symphonic prose in Opyt Krantsa, but to give too much weight to it (at this stage of his career) would be no less a mistake. The two more obvious models are Germann from Pushkin's Pikovaya Dama and Raskol'nikov from Dostoevskii's Prestuplenie i nakazanie. Like Germann, Krants has a German name, although he is presumably Russian, and he embodies some of the characteristics which Russians traditionally regard as Germanic, namely great self control amounting to repression, and a love of precision and reason. Krants's three visits to the gambling hall, his self control after the first two wins, the calm way in which he drinks a lemonade, and, finally, his loss of control on the third night and the revelation of his passion for money - all of this is borrowed from Pikovaya Dama. Characteristically, Kataev reveals Krants's true nature by an external detail which is highly significant. As he leaves the table having lost his fortune, he lights a cigarette and hears someone say that he is holding it by the wrong end. Moreover, his senses, which had been so clear and distinct, become confused, and as he hears the phrase he can also see the words in red letters. The choice of a dramatic detail such as holding the wrong end of a cigarette is typical of Kataev's approach to characterization, which basically consists of the accumulation of

significant external detail. This is a feature of his work which remains constant throughout his career.

The process by which Zosin justifies the idea of murdering Krants recalls some of Raskol'nikov's ideas:

Если я не способен ни на что другое, я должен убить. А если я не способен даже на убийство, значит, я ничтожество и должен всегда жить, как ничтожество. Неправда, что есть совесть и какие-то законы, не разрешающие убить. Неправда, что это преступление. Неправда, неправда! (1,145-6)

Like Dostoevskii's hero, Zosin considers murder to be a test of whether he is a man or a nonentity while simultaneously justifying the idea of murder on the grounds that he needs money whereas Krants does not.

While leaning heavily on Dostoevskii and, in particular, Pushkin, Opyt Krantsa is nevertheless an important step forward for Kataev. The characters are scarcely original, but, unlike the heroes of Kataev's earlier stories, Zosin and Krants are not based on the author himself. In Opyt Krantsa Kataev has gone beyond his earlier work and has attempted to create two completely imagined characters.

Kataev places Zosin and Krants in a situation which produces severe mental upset and he is thereby enabled to introduce into the story elements of delirium and fantasy, which combine with the story's realistic elements to form a blend which was to become characteristic of Kataev's short stories of the 1920s. Krants appears to be cool and rational about his experiment but subconsciously the force of greed takes control of him and, like another mathematician, D-503 from Zamyatin's novel My, he begins to think in images far

removed from the precise logical world of mathematics:

'Солнце било, и окна и комната горели янтарным светом.

В комнате все блестело, лучилось, и Кранцу казалось, что все полакировано желтым лаком.' (1,147)

In Zosin, physical illness, the effect of cocaine, and lust combine to produce a state of extreme agitation in which the boundaries between the senses are swept away:

Ощущая на щеках жар, Зосин смотрел из темноты зрительного зала на сцену. Музыка звучала страстно и откровенно, и невидимо-разноцветные звуки то беспрерывно лучисто струились снизу из освещенного оркестра, то рассыпались прозрачно стеклянными, длинными, томными волнами... По сцене, в синем свете ramпы и трепещущих и шипящих фиолетовых пятнах рефлектора, носилась Клементьева со своим любовником. Все их движения были точно и мягко овальные, разноцветны и казались составной частью музыки. (1,139)

Such passages are fairly numerous in Opyt Krantsa.

The interest in synaesthesia finds a parallel in Kataev's verse, but the imagery is more unusual, less precise than in the poems which were written under the direct influence of Bunin. It is possible that here and in several other stories of the 1920s Kataev was influenced by such authors as Remizov or Pil'nyak, although there is no direct evidence in the form of statements by Kataev or unmistakable similarities. It seems more likely that the increasing use of *recherche* metaphors and similes may be explained by Kataev's desire to experiment, and to introduce into his work elements of the fantastic. This he does strictly within a realistic framework by ascribing most of the unusual imagery to one of his characters who is in an abnormal state of mind.

In Trava zabven'ya Kataev suggests that the major significance of Opyt Krantsa lies in its atmosphere of a doomed bourgeois city besieged by the Red army. (9,330) In the first short chapter of the story an attempt is made to place the action in time and space by using some of the details from 'Zapiski o grazhdanskoi voine', but once the story of Krants's experiment begins the social setting is forgotten. Indeed Serafimovich, who edited the journal Novyi mir in which the story was published in January 1922, criticised Kataev for a one-sided, romantic approach which did not stress sufficiently the role of the Red Army waiting on the outskirts of the doomed city. It had been Kataev's original intention to finish the story with the words: 'Вы держите папиросу не тем концом,' Serafimovich himself wrote the short final paragraph about the fall of the city (which was included in the first published version, and has been kept in all subsequent editions).¹ Thus the view expressed by Kataev in Trava zabven'ya that the social contrasts in Opyt Krantsa are its most important feature cannot be substantiated from the story itself. Even with Serafimovich's extra paragraph the 'doomed city' motif is secondary to the characters and the opportunity which they provide for verbal experimentation. Opyt Krantsa could take place at any time and in any setting; the social contrasts, such as they are, do no more than add a little poignancy to the story.

The number of Novyi mir in which Opyt Krantsa was published also contained another story by Kataev about Odessa

1. See the note on 1,597.

in the Civil War entitled V osazhdennom gorode. Unlike Opyt Krantsa, V osazhdennom gorode is very precisely located in the Odessa of 1918-1919. It shares with the sketch 'Zapiski o grazhdanskoi voine' the atmosphere of a decadent cosmopolitan city doomed to fall to the Red Army. A drunken sailor stumbles into a tavern in pursuit of a young student whom he takes for a counter-revolutionary spy. The young man has been sniffing cocaine and is in a state of near ecstasy in which all of his senses are particularly acute. In a conversation with the sailor he recalls his wonderful life before the Revolution in a world which has now changed. The sailor then jumps to his feet, denounces the student as a counter-revolutionary spy responsible for the death of the sailor's comrade, shoots him dead and runs out into the street.

The most remarkable feature of V osazhdennom gorode is the degree to which Kataev sympathises with the young student (a fact which is ignored in the misleading discussion of the story by Soviet critics).¹ It is not clear whether the student is indeed the White Guard agent Gess or whether he is merely unfortunate enough to be the casual victim of a man crazed by grief and drink. What is certain, however, is Kataev's sympathy for him and identification with his tastes. Like the heroes of the earlier stories Baraban and Noch'yu, the young student regrets the passing of his comfortable way of life which the Revolution has brought to an end. His concern is not with the new society but with the effect on his own life

1. See, for example, L. Skorino, Pisatel' i ego vremya, pp. 172-3; T. Sidel'nikova, Valentin Kataev..., pp. 32-3; B. Brainina, 'O nekotorykh osobennostyakh stilya V. Kataeva' in Sovetskaya khudozhestvennaya proza: sbornik statei (M., 1955), p. 367.

of the great upheaval of Revolution and Civil War. He says:

Вы только представьте, вы только подумайте, - говорил он, - я ничего не знаю, я ничего не понимаю. Но только то, что было, тот прекрасный, изумительный мир, который был раньше, навсегда и безвозвратно умер. То, что в городе голод, - не важно. Важно, что нет книг и нет новых журналов, нет сотни тысяч мелочей, из которых складывалась прошлая жизнь. (1,156)

Taken out of context, this passage could be interpreted as being ironical, but the closeness elsewhere in the story of Kataev and his character suggests that the passage may be taken at its face value. The most convincing evidence linking Kataev's sympathies with the student rather than the sailor is the fact that the student is a poet who is aware of the beauty of the physical world surrounding him and the treasure of his senses. He says:

От туги сложенных, забандероленных газет пахнет сыростью и морозом, а от писем холодным, яблочным клеем...фонари горят в зале, как елочные звезды. Возле проруби стоят игрушечные кустарные бабы с ведрами, а вагон мотает, и хочется спать, и фонарь, задернутый красной занавеской, стрекочет кузнечиком. Ах, всего этого нельзя рассказать. Об этом можно только написать стихи. (1,156)

Kataev's own language in this story (i.e. the author's narrative) is highly poetical; alliteration and even rhyme have been carefully considered, as in the following example :

В великолепном стрекотании кино, упрямо повторявшем каждый вечер сияющее отражение некогда живших, в шелковом хрусте карточных вееров над ломберной зеленью клубов, в костяном шелке ночных выстрелов, похожих на щелк бильярдных шаров, и в щелке бильярдных шаров, похожих на выстрелы, осаждаемый с трех сторон красными город шел к гибели. (1,153)

That the young student should be so acutely aware of poetry and of his senses is enough to bring together his point

of view and that of the author, for both are lyrical and elegaic. In contrast, the sailor remains outside the author's point of view; he is strange, incomprehensible and frightening. He is described as 'drunk' with 'mad eyes'. Skorino's interpretation of the story, which is coloured by the requirement that the Bolshevik should be the hero and the White Guard should be despicable, takes no account of the beauty and lyricism of the student's language, so like Kataev's own, nor of the unpleasantness of the sailor. To imply that at this stage of his career Kataev had already begun to see the Revolution and Civil War consistently from the point of view of the Bolsheviks is to misinterpret his work.

The young hero of V osazhdennom gorode has much in common with other Kataevan characters of this period and could well be considered as the typical hero. His detachment from the great events of the epoch; his longing for the return of the comfortable pre-war world; his love of poetry and his conviction that it alone is capable of expressing the beauty of the world; lastly, his realisation of the proximity and irreversibility of death ('chto-to uzhasnoe, nepopravimoe') - all of these features are shared with the heroes of other stories (although not all are present in all stories).

The hero of Praporshchik (1921) is apparently more closely involved in the events of the Civil War than the detached student heroes of Opyt Krantsa and V osazhdennom gorode. Yet he too feels that the events of the war have

nothing to do with him personally. He is caught up in action which he neither supports nor understands. Although he is a good soldier, Ensign Chaban is essentially no different from previous heroes. (Indeed, his lineage is underlined by the description 'a typical student'.) During the First World War he had fought bravely in the Tsar's army because it had been his duty and he had been sure of his enemy. His military career bears a fairly close resemblance to that of Kataev himself, even to the award of two medals and his sabre inscribed with the words 'For valour'.¹ In 1919 Chaban is mobilised into the Volunteer Army to fight against the Reds, and just before his departure for the front he meets a former schoolfriend who admits to being a Communist. Faced with a situation in which a former friend has become the enemy, Chaban is thrown into a state of utter confusion which soon leads to panic. For the first time in his life he is so terrified that he is unable to remain in the battle area and in order to escape he shoots himself in the hand. The ending, in which Chaban realises that truth is on the side of the Communists, strikes a false note, as does the entry of the Bolshevik detachment in the story Zolotoe pero, written the previous year.²

Praporshchik is a weaker story than V osazhdennom gorode because the naive hero is less interesting, and because of the unconvincing ending, which, even more than the ending of Opyt Krantsa, remains unintegrated. It is not, however,

1. See Trava zabven'ya 9,302.

2. This story is discussed in Chapter three.

without interest. Chaban's terror places him in a state not unlike Zosin's delirium. Once again Kataev has the opportunity to introduce some striking imagery ('и только резкая желтая полоса заката, как бритва, резала глаза' 1,215) although the unusual metaphors and similes are not restricted to Chaban. The hero's disorientation is conveyed by means of an ostranenie effect, especially in the scene in which the general addresses his troops before the armoured train leaves for the front. His words and the actions of the priest conducting prayers seem senseless, and Chaban reacts mechanically and uncomprehendingly like all around him.

Kataev incorporated Praporshchik with very few changes into a novel entitled Priklyucheniya parovoza published in 1925. The novel is a weak, whimsical piece in which the story of revolutionary events in Russia from 1905 until 1919 is told from the point of view of a locomotive. The device of ostranenie is here taken to absurd lengths:

Скажем, паровозы. Ну, конечно, бывают хорошие паровозы и плохие, новые и старые. Сильные и слабые, наконец, русские и заграничные. Но все-таки, они все - паровозы, и друг перед другом нос не задирают и не эксплуатируют друг друга.¹

Only when, three-quarters of the way through the tale, the story of Ensign Chaban is told does a spark of life flicker in the novel. Priklyucheniya parovoza illustrates what Kremlev has called 'Kataev's careless attitude to his talent' at this time.²

1. V. Kataev, Priklyucheniya parovoza (M.-L., 1925), p. 16.

2. See note 1, p. 59.

Zheleznoe kol'tso (1920) is one of the best of Kataev's stories of the 1920s in which his ebullient love of life, his romantic taste in literature, and his developing skill as a short story writer are all evident. The theme of the story is common to most of Kataev's work of the first half of the 1920s, namely that human happiness and misery and the beauty of life are constants, discovered anew by each generation, and are not dependent upon particular social conditions. In order to emphasise his theme Kataev uses the figure of Dr Faustus to link the time of Pushkin and the present day. Three young romantic poets sit in a bar in Odessa during the Civil War drinking wine and telling tales. One of them tells a story about a meeting in Odessa between Dr Faustus and Pushkin in the course of which the travelling doctor gives Pushkin a simple iron ring with a cheap turquoise stone which, when worn by a truly happy man, has the power to make everything around it beautiful. Many years have passed and the exact location of the ring is not known, although it must still be in Odessa because the sun still shines out of the blue sky on the city and the plums which are sold in the market place are still covered by a captivating turquoise dust. Just as the narrator of the story reaches his conclusion the three young men are joined in the bar by Dr Faustus himself who throws an iron ring onto their table as a sign that he recognises in them three truly happy men. They run out into the street after him, but he has disappeared and when they return to the inn the ring, too, has gone. But they are not downhearted, for they are young, they have a bottle

of wine and enough oil to light a lamp by which to read a Stevenson story.

Zheleznoe kol'tso embraces several time planes and several intertwining stories but Kataev never loses his way. His touch is sure, and his handling of the Pushkin/Amalia Riznich story is particularly adroit. Despite the great unhappiness of exile and the loss of Mme Riznich, Pushkin remains an essentially happy man, whose reaction to the departure of his beloved Amalia is to say to Tumanskii:

Пойдем, дружище. Она уже далеко. В кофейне усатого капитана уже, вероятно, собрались шахматные игроки, и томная Ифигения разносит на жестяном подносе чашечки бобового кофе и рахат-лунум. Пойдем же, я тебе расскажу забавную историю об одном странствующем чудаче с наружностью Фауста, подарившем мне это железное кольцо с бирюзой. Утри слезы, нас ждут чубуки, пойдем же. (1,168)

At the end of the tale the narrator of the story about Dr Faustus addresses his companions in very similar terms:

Ну, друзья, делать нечего. Идемте в мою берлогу. У меня в светильнике есть еще часа на три бензина. А Стивенсон - прекрасный писатель для чтения в свободное время. (1,172)

For both Pushkin and the narrator, true happiness transcends the varying fortunes of life. The key passage in the story, which acts almost as a leitmotif in Kataev's short stories of the first half of the 1920s, consists of the following words on the nature of happiness spoken by Pushkin, but equally applicable to the narrator and his friends:

Кто знает, что такое счастье? Иные думают, что счастье - это золото, иные полагают его в молодости и любви; есть безумцы, считающие счастьем бессмертие и славу! Но, милостивый

государь, счастлив ли я? Ежели этот ветер,
и прибой, и свет, и тень, и говор волн -
счастье, ежели паруса, уходящие на юг - счастье,
о, тогда я счастлив и благодарю небо за это
несовершенное, горькое, прекрасное, обыкновенное,
человеческое счастье. (1,166)

The last few words of this passage are to be found with very slight changes in Ryzhie krestiki and Otets, and their repetition in this way adds greatly to their significance. Kataev's acceptance of life as it is, his view that human happiness is independent of time or social system forms the philosophical basis of his work of the 1920s, and it was this fact above all which was to bring him into conflict with literary critics (especially RAPP critics) at the end of the decade.

Kataev does not identify the three young poets of Zheleznoe kol'tso, but it can be reasonably assumed that the poets are stylisations of Kataev himself, Olesha, and Bagritskii. Kataev writes in Trava zabven'ya: 'А мы, молодые, те самые, на которых он стучал тогда палкой, были Багрицкий, Олеша, я... Про нас тогда говорили в городе с некоторым страхом, смешанным с удивлением: "Эти трое!"' (9,327) Just as one of the poets in Zheleznoe kol'tso offers to read Stevenson to his two companions, so did Bagritskii act as a literary guide, introducing his friends to the work of Stevenson, Villon, Rimbaud and others. Many authors who were subsequently to become famous have spoken of Bagritskii's wide reading and of his passionate desire to acquaint his friends with those authors whom he discovered for himself.¹

1. See several articles by Bagritskii's contemporaries in V. Narbut (ed.), Eduard Bagritskii, al'bom (M., 1936). See also 'Stikhi Bagritskogo polny ritmom bol'shevizma', Literaturnaya gazeta, 18 February 1934 signed by Babel', Kataev, Il'f, Petrov, and Olesha.

Kataev's friendship with Bagritskii was a deep, enduring one which began at their first meeting as schoolboys and lasted until Bagritskii's death in 1934.¹

The hero of Kataev's story Bezdel'nik Eduard is obviously based in part on Bagritskii. Among the features which Kataev's character Eduard Tochkin shares with Bagritskii are his first name, his asthma, his love of romantic literature (especially Rimbaud) and his interest in ornithology. Although Tochkin is the butt of Kataev's humour, there is no malice in the portrayal; indeed the warmth which the author feels for his character suggests the closeness to Bagritskii and, in certain respects, to himself.

Bezdel'nik Eduard was Kataev's longest story to date, consisting of fifteen short chapters. Written in 1920, it was originally planned as part of a longer work - a novella to be called Pokhozhdeniya trekh bezdel'nikov, of which the only other surviving part is the story Zimoi written three years later. Pokhozhdeniya trekh bezdel'nikov was conceived as a loosely constructed work about the lives of three dreamers who combine a romantic enthusiasm for the Revolution with a desire for comfort and a love of romantic literature, and who manage somehow to survive during the difficult years of the Civil War. In the second paragraph Kataev warns the reader not to take his tale too literally: 'Но уж если рассказывать, так рассказывать, не боясь преувеличений и метафор - в духе того чудесного, романтического времени.' (1,183)

Eduard Tochkin is an impecunious poet whose character is jokingly summed up by Kataev in the sentence: 'Страшный лентяй, плут и авантюрист, он был достойным учеником своего

1. See Kataev's story Vstrecha (1,419-27) for an account of his first meeting with Bagritskii.

легендарного учителя, славного мэтра Артюра Рембо.' (1,183)

He welcomes the October Revolution with great fervour, for it seems to him to be a latter day version of Anatole France's Les Dieux ont soif; in his imagination Marat and Robespierre are reborn. However the Revolution brings in its wake difficult days of 'suffering, struggle and hunger'. Eduard becomes expert in the art of selling goods in order to remain alive and his mother is forced to lock everything away to save it from her son. He meets and marries the widow of an army doctor who has a flat full of things which can be sold. For the first time in months Eduard can enjoy the luxury of warmth, food and the leisure to read his beloved Stevenson. After a short period working in YugRosta he settles down to a life with no earnings and at the same time he begins to collect birds. Soon the flat is full of birds in cages and more and more goods have to be sold to pay for birdseed and more birds. Eduard is oblivious to everything except his birds and he fails to see the impending disaster. His wife manages to keep them both alive only by secretly freeing or killing the birds. At the end of the story Eduard is as unworldly as ever, still harbouring an ambition to keep singing cage birds.

For all his romantic involvement with the Revolution (he writes beautiful iambic pentameters on revolutionary themes), Eduard remains essentially detached from the great events of the epoch. His attempt to further the cause of the Revolution by working in YugRosta ends in failure. His obsession with birds appears selfish but, in fact, his unworldly lack of interest in goods for their own sake is an endearing quality

and explains in large measure the warmth of Kataev's portrayal compared with that of Shurka from the story Veshchi, whose selfishness takes the form of a blind love of things. Eduard requires only the minimum amount of food and warmth to enable him to read and write. The most interesting feature of Bezdel'nik Eduard for Kataev's development is the warmly ironical attitude towards the hero, which acts as a bridge between stories such as Baraban and A + B v kvadrate on the one hand and the hero of the tetralogy Volny Chernogo morya on the other. For all the character's faults Kataev loves Eduard Tochkin and his love is communicated in the tone of warm humour and gentle irony.

Of all the stories written in the early 1920s, perhaps the most significant for the later development of Kataev's work is Ser Genri i chert (1920), not because of any new element which it introduces but because in it Kataev makes full use of the fantasy which is present to a lesser degree in Opyt Krantsa and V osazhdennom gorode. The entire story consists of the delirious dreams of a typhus victim (its subtitle is Sypnoi tif). At first he is vaguely aware of what is being done to him - of travelling in a train, of having his head shaved, of being bathed and put to bed. Then, as his delirium grows more acute, the pain in his ear becomes personified as Sir Henry, who is first of all a supercilious English student and then the captain of a pirate ship. The sick man travels with Sir Henry to an island where there is no soil, only gold, and where the inhabitants crave for the dust which he has brought on his boots from the Besieged City. Finally, Sir Henry is replaced by the devil, who enters the hospital ward just as the typhus victim is

pronounced dead.

The principal significance of Ser Genri i chert lies in the scope afforded by the subject matter for sheer fantasy. Unconstrained by reason or the demands of a conventional plot, Kataev indulges in extremely striking imagery, reminiscent in places of the work of the Futurist poets, and in nightmarishly sudden changes of scene. The story thus exhibits to a great extent that fluidity and feverish quality which characterises many of Kataev's works of the 1920s. Kataev attempts to convey the nature of the delirium caused by typhus by involving all of the senses (in this respect the story continues a feature of the author's poetry).

Огненные папиросы ползали по перрону ракетами, рассыпая искры и взрываясь... Железо било в железо... На голове лежал тяжелый камень, то холодный, то горячий. Потом меня начало в автомобиле, и резкий сыпнотифозный запах дезинфекции смешивался с бензиновым дымом. (1,173)

These extracts, taken from the first paragraph, illustrate the involvement of all of the senses (although the full effect is only gained by reading the entire paragraph). Because of the delirium, the many sense impressions are dissociated from their causes, thus achieving an effect of alienation or ostranenie. In other words, because the sick man has lost the ability to reason, his sense impressions are not constrained by a knowledge of cause and effect.

Before the intensification of the fever the hero is capable of recalling his three months of service on an armoured train and his desire to return to the sweet decadence of the

Besieged City (which is not named, but is obviously Odessa). We learn enough about the hero before the onset of total delirium to be able to classify him as one of the typical Kataevan heroes of this period, for whom the war and its causes are less important than his former way of life and the pleasures of the city. Like Krants and the unnamed student hero of V osazhdennom gorode, and even Eduard Tochkin, he is more concerned with himself and his own survival and physical wellbeing than with the political and military events of the age.

The influence of Stevenson probably accounts for the idea of the island covered with gold dust but the theme of the obsessive desire for wealth is pure Kataev.¹ In the dying man's delirium, life and wealth become synonymous, and he therefore fears the loss of his gold above all other dangers. Yet Kataev casts an ironic light on his own desire for wealth and his characters' obsession with personal possessions by the device of reversing the values of dust and gold. The inhabitants of the island also crave for wealth, only for them it takes the form of ordinary dust from the Besieged City. In the simultaneous desire for wealth and the ironical censure of those who live for money can be seen Kataev's life-long attitude to one of the major themes of his work.

One other theme which links Ser Genri i chert with other stories of the 1920s is the fear of the irreparable nature of death. Time after time in Kataev's works death,

1. In general, English and French popular fiction has exerted an important influence throughout Kataev's career, providing him with a rich source of themes and plots.

especially violent death, is described as irreparable ('nepopravimyi'). Due no doubt to the chance nature of life and death in wartime and to Kataev's own narrow escape from death during the Civil War, the theme of the uniqueness of each individual's life and the finality of death is particularly prevalent in the first half of the 1920s. Ser Genri i chert closes with the words:

И чей-то знакомый и незнакомый, страшно
далекый и маленький (как за стеной) голос
сказал то ужасное, короткое и единственное
слово, смысл которого для меня был темен,
но совершенно и навсегда непоправим. (1,182)

The student in V osazhdennom gorode feels that: 'С ним происходит что-то ужасное, непоправимое и все летит к черту.' (1,157) The theme receives its most extensive treatment in Otets, where it forms part of the wider theme of the beauty of life and the nature of human happiness.

Kataev has recently expressed the view that the so-called innovation of Svyatoi kolodets and Kubik should be viewed rather as a development of the style and techniques used in Ser Genri i chert.¹ But one need not look so far into the future for signs of the importance of Ser Genri i chert in Kataev's work, for it contains much that is significant for the whole Civil War and post Civil War period.

Firstly, it provides the most extreme example of a character in an unusually intense state of mental agitation. Here the reason is illness; in Rastratchiki it is drunkenness;

1. Conversation between Kataev and the present author 18 May 1971. See also V. Kataev, 'Obnovlenie prozy', Voprosy literatury, 1971, No. 2, p. 131.

in V osazhdennom gorode it is the effect of drugs; in Otets it is fear; in Ogon' it is grief; and in Zimoi it is love. Whatever the cause, the result is delirium, and the inclusion of a delirious character allows the author to introduce striking images and an element of fantasy which gives his work its characteristic tone. Only in Svyatoi kolodets does Kataev return to the pure delirium of Ser Genri i chert; in all of the other works mentioned a balance is maintained between the central character's delirium and some other factor, usually the author's own voice, which adds a more soberly realistic note to the narrative. Closely related to this point is Kataev's liking at this time for extravagant imagery (perhaps most evident in Opyt Krantsa). Finally, Ser Genri i chert restates Kataev's love of life, irrespective of social system - life as such - and his fear of death, themes which are present in most of the stories of this period.

2.2.2 Otets and Zimoi: Two Transitional Stories

Of the stories written in the first half of the 1920s two stand out by virtue of their serious philosophical nature. Both Otets and Zimoi are highly personal stories based in large measure on Kataev's own experiences, and, taken together, they mark a transition in Kataev's work to full independence and maturity.

Otets, which Kataev once described as his favourite story, and on which he worked for three years, was submitted for publication to the editors of Krasnaya nov' in 1925 but

remained unpublished until 1928.¹ In length, seriousness of purpose, and style it is one of the most significant of Kataev's works of the 1920s.

At the beginning of the tale the hero, Petr Ivanovich Sinaiskii, is a prisoner in the jail in his home town. His widowed father, racked by a pathetic anxiety for his son, makes frequent visits to the prison in the hope of catching a glimpse of Petr at one of the cell windows. Eventually, after several months of prison life, his case is reviewed by the investigator and he is released. During his first evening at home he recalls a vow made in childhood to be considerate and loving towards his father - a vow which he had not kept. Now, overcome by feelings of tenderness and love for the frail, anxious old man, he renews the vow and determines never again to be a source of worry to his father. As previously, however, he breaks his vow and, finding life with his father tedious, obtains a warm comfortable room in the town centre. The old man, who is now incapable of living alone, goes to live with his niece while the son continues to live comfortably (and selfishly) alone.

In spring Petr Ivanovich is sent to the nearby villages to spread propaganda among the peasants. His father, who is afraid that Petr will be killed by one of the marauding bands which still terrorise the countryside, pleads in vain with him

1. A comment in an article by Kataev seems to suggest that the long delay before publication may have been due to the censor. He describes Otets as: '"по независящим от дирекции обстоятельствам" пролежавший в столе 3 года.' V. Kataev, 'Pisateli o sebe', Na literaturnom postu, 1928, No. 6, p. 91.

not to go. A week later Petr dreams about his father and wakes in tears. A telegram from his cousin Darya awaits him at the post office, but by the time he reaches Darya's home his father has died and been buried. After hearing from Darya the details of his father's last few days Petr Ivanovich sells all the old man's possessions and travels north to begin a new life.

Petr Ivanovich's behaviour towards his father is presented as being extremely selfish, especially in the painful scene where the old man, made desperate by cold and loneliness, visits his son's new apartment in the hope of being asked to stay. Petr Ivanovich either fails or refuses to recognise the real reason for his father's visit, and, after giving him a cup of coffee, he allows him to go:

И отец, согретый и оживший, выскочил в ледяной, черный подъезд, так и не сказав сыну, зачем он пришел. А пришел он затем, чтобы попроситься жить вместе с сыном в теплой и низкой комнате, попросить перчатки и немного хлеба.

Петр Иванович с нетерпением возвратился в комнату и поспешно задул светильник. (1,243)

In his anxiety to return to the girl who is with him Petr Ivanovich appears heartless. Yet although the reader is made aware of Petr Ivanovich's selfishness through Kataev's presentation, the main point of the story lies elsewhere. It is that Petr Ivanovich's behaviour is perfectly natural. Writing several years after the publication of Otets the critic V. Rossolovskaya suggests that:

Природа жестока, но она прекрасна в своей жестокости. Старость жалка и отвратительна, и природа ее отрицает. ¹Сын прав, потому что он полон радостью жизни.

1. V. Rossolovskaya, 'Tvorchestvo Valentina Kataeva', Molodaya gvardiya, 1933, No. 6, pp. 125-32.

While Rossolovskaya undoubtedly overstates her case (for instance she takes no account of Kataev's natural tendency towards self-criticism, and his ironical attitude towards autobiographical characters) her view is substantially correct. One of the major themes linking Otets to Kataev's other short stories of the 1920s is that of the innate goodness of life, highlighted by the proximity and irrevocability of death. Even moments of pain and bitterness form a part of a wonderful life:

Тюрьма была видна с кладбища. Кладбище было видно из тюрьмы. Так в жизни сходились концы с концами, в этой удивительной, горькой и прекрасной, обыкновенной человеческой жизни! (1,222)

On the journey from the prison to the investigator's office where his fate will be decided Sinaiskii is struck by the beauty around him; the huge expanse of earth, damp and wonderfully fertile after a shower, the green branches touched by the yellow of autumn, the air, bluish and misty like a soap bubble. After experiencing several months of imprisonment and faced now by the possibility of death, he drinks in the beauty of the world. Similarly, the death of his father, much as it saddens him, serves to emphasise the uniqueness of his own life and the splendour of the world in which he lives. After his father's death Sinaiskii sees in the world an emptiness and a freshness ('pustota i svezhest'') which he had not observed before. In this phrase Kataev sums up the duality involved in his hero's reaction to his father's death; it is simultaneously painful and liberating. Similarly, when Petr Ivanovich calls in the second-hand dealers in order to

sell all of his father's possessions, including the prized books, he experiences the terrible ambiguity of his reactions to his father's death:

Громадные пласты прошлого откалывались и грохотали, сползая вниз по ступеням и заряжая лестницу громом четырехэтажного эха. Ящики пустели, как жизнь. Голоса, уже ничем не спираемые, летали по комнате, воя и оглушая. Шаги гремели, как брошенные штанги, pistolетными выстрелами. Ключья писем и карточек устилали пустой пол. На полу лежали иконы. Все было кончено. Петр Иванович спрятал деньги в карман, повесил на дверь замок, отдал ключ в домком и через неделю уехал на север. (1,254)

This paragraph divides into two unequal sections at the word 'ikony'. In the first section metaphors and similes proliferate until the entire sentence structure seems about to collapse under their weight. The ponderous style is matched by the meaning - the pain of recollection, the power of the past, conjured up by the room full of possessions. The second section of the paragraph is completely different. Where there was a heavy, image-laden style there is now abrupt simplicity; where there was introspection and pain there is now only brusque activity. The change of mood is achieved by switching from description to action, from imperfective verbs ('otkalyvalis', 'grokhotali', 'letali') to perfective verbs following each other swiftly and decisively ('spryatal', 'povesil', 'otdal', 'uekhal'). The construction of this paragraph corresponds to the ambiguity in Petr Ivanovich's reaction to his father's death. He is both confused and grief stricken and, at the same time, free to build a new life. This is as it should be, for Petr Ivanovich's reaction is as natural as was his failure to keep the vows.

Just as any form of life is beautiful - 'Петр Иванович опять (в который раз!) думал о своей удивительной, горькой и прекрасной, обыкновенной человеческой жизни ' (1,220) - so is Petr Ivanovich's behaviour not reprehensible, for it is dictated by nature: 'Но случилось все по-иному, случилось так, как должно было случиться.' (1,237)

The final chapter, consisting of one fairly short sentence, recapitulates and crystallises the major point of the story: 'И небо, как незабываемое отцовское лицо, обливало над сыном горячими, теплыми и радостными звездами.' (1,255) Nature, in the form of the stars, seems to approve, or at least condone, Petr Ivanovich's behaviour. Moreover, in using the word 'unforgettable' ('nezabyvaemoe') of the father's face, Kataev is suggesting that Petr Ivanovich's new life in the north does not represent a complete rejection of the past. The south, with its weight of memories, will remain a part of his life but the north will provide an opportunity for further development: 'Ночь летела из распахнувшегося чернозема, и Петр Иванович встречал ее, как новую жизнь, обнаженной грудью и похолодевшим лицом.' (1,254-5) Thus Otets can be seen as a serious work in which the hero seeks to reassess his life at a critical point. The importance of the theme for Kataev himself may be inferred from the similarities between Otets and his own life and by the length of time which he devoted to his 'favourite' work.

As might be expected in view of the important position of Otets in Kataev's work of the 1920s the style of the story is complex, with many unusually striking images (most of which

are fresh and apt). For example: 'А ночь уже заводила свои звездные часы граненым ключиком частого сентябрьского сверчка.' (1,220) In the penultimate paragraph, at the point where Petr Ivanovich is on his way to the north, we find the following simile: 'Черная ночь, как ломоть ржаного хлеба, взятого в дорогу, на совесть посыпанная крупной солью, была темна и полезна.' (1,255) This strange, apparently nonsensical image can be justified psychologically in that Petr Ivanovich feels that nature, far from being remote and indifferent, has now become understanding and intimate. The same point is reinforced by the final chapter in which the night is once more likened to something familiar and intimate, namely the father's face.

Some of the most striking metaphors and similes relate to Sinaiskii's childhood, and, in particular, the death of his mother. 'А потом через эту жизнь переплыл белый гроб матери - пышный торт с зубчатой бумагой.' (1,220) Or again: 'На улице гроб вдвинули в колесницу, как пластинку в кассету фотографического аппарата.' (1,221) As with the previous examples, the principle of these images is to liken something unknown and frightening to something familiar and reassuring. Besides this, though, the images illustrate the development of Kataev's attempt to follow Bunin in seeking the comparison which will convey exactly to the reader the nature of the object involved. The author of Otets is, himself, like the figure of Bunin in Kataev's story Музыка, listening carefully to a particular noise and casting around in his mind for the one comparison which will convey it precisely and unmistakably.

In spite of some excesses of naturalism, such as the yellow flesh of melons being like diarrhoea or the decomposing matter oozing out of the dead mother's mouth in a creamy foam, the style of Otets must rank as one of the successes of Kataev's work of the 1920s. For the most part the imagery is fresh and inventive, if occasionally over-elaborate. Considerable thought has been given to the visual and auditory effect of the work, for example the assonance and alliteration in the sentence: 'Отец, Иван Петрович, безучастно начался в начале.' (1,221)

Like other works of the period Otets portrays a character during moments of great mental strain, both in the face of his own possible death at the hands of his captors and on the death of his father. The more bland style which Kataev was to adopt during the 1930s lacks the complexity to convey such intensity of emotion. Not until the publication of Svyatoi kolodets does Kataev revert to the density and capriciousness of style evident in Otets.

Critics of Kataev's work have sometimes asserted that his psychological portraits are weak.¹ In a spirited article V.F. Sizykh has put forward the opposite view, maintaining that there is more than one way to achieve psychological veracity, and comparing Kataev's method to that of Turgenev, in that both authors reveal the psychological state of their characters through well-chosen, telling external details.² By no means all of Kataev's characters (especially adults) are

1. See, for example, B. Brainina, 'O nekotorykh osobennostyakh... pp. 383-6.

2. V.F. Sizykh, 'Nekotorye osobennosti masterstva V. Kataeva', Uchenye zapiski Ussuriiskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo instituta, 1958, 2, pp. 217-39.

convincingly drawn, but Sizykh's view serves as a useful corrective to the prevailing opinion, and deserves sympathetic examination. Certainly, several stories of the 1920s such as Ogon', Rebenok and Otets contain convincing characters. Without probing deeply into the psychology of his characters by means of analysis, Kataev endows both of the principal figures of Otets with some depth.

Petr Ivanovich's father appears as an abject figure because the point of view is that of his son for whom old age as such is unnatural and even repulsive. Petr Ivanovich's attitude colours the portrait of the old man and accounts for such naturalistic details as the characteristic smell of the aged which he emits, the dandruff in his hair, the whining, pitiful tone of his voice and his almost inarticulate mumblings. Yet a different view of Ivan Petrovich does penetrate the surface picture, creating a denser, more complex character. When his wife dies, he remains ostensibly calm, but his grief is expressed by means of a typical detail:

Отец, Иван Петрович, безучастно качался в
 качалке. Петя влез к нему на колени и очень
 близко увидел его заплаканные, малиновые,
 удивительные, без пенсне, собачьи глаза;
 (1,221)

The picture of Ivan Petrovich rocking to and fro in his chair illustrates Sizykh's thesis that external detail can be a pointer to character in Kataev's work. In passing it is worth noting that the description 'dog's eyes' ('sobach'i glaza'), which may appear heartless, is an instance where Kataev has chosen what seems to be the correct adjective for his purpose of accurate description irrespective of whether

or not it appears callous.¹

Two further viewpoints add complexity to the picture of Ivan Petrovich, helping to balance the son's picture of him as a helpless and pathetic old man. In Petr Ivanovich's recollection of his childhood illness his father emerges as an earnest, conscientious, rather lonely man of considerable dignity. Similarly, Darya paints a picture of a fine dignified man who has simply grown old, helpless and forgetful but who remains worthy of respect rather than disgust. 'В гробу, представь себе, дядя выглядел на десять лет моложе, красивый такой, понимаешь, даже элегантный - такой самый, как, помнишь, когда собирался вечером на лекцию.' (1,249)

The multiplicity of viewpoint establishes the overall picture of Ivan Petrovich, and it corresponds to Petr Ivanovich's ambiguous feelings towards his father. Ivan Petrovich is presented both as a fine man worthy of great respect and as a pathetic, incoherent old man for whom Petr Ivanovich simultaneously feels tender love and exasperated revulsion.

The other important figure in the story, Petr Ivanovich Sinaiskii, is also drawn with a degree of complexity which belies the predominant view of Kataev as a poor psychologist. Enough has already been said of his attitude toward his father. There remains, however, the important scene in the investigator's office during which Kataev explores one of his favourite subjects - the mind of a person under extreme pressure. Here the pressure is fear of death, under which Sinaiskii temporarily

1. Compare this with the description of Vera Nikolaevna Bunina in Trava zabven'ya (9,436).

loses his sanity. It appears to him that the key to his life or death lies in not moving his feet and simultaneously picking up scraps of paper from the floor. In the obsessive concentration on tiny, apparently irrelevant details which take on ominous significance, there is a preview of a technique used with great effect in Svyatoi kolodets where the fact that the narrator's shoes are dirty seems to be a matter of life or death. When the possibility of death lies so close the desire for life becomes overwhelming, destroying all other feeling and intensifying the awareness of the surrounding physical world to an abnormal degree.

The importance of Otets lies in the fact that in it several aspects of Kataev's developing talent come together to produce a work of considerable seriousness. Stylistically, the story reflects Kataev's attainment of maturity. Despite a few unintegrated or artificial images, its blend of striking metaphors and similes and impressive accuracy of description testifies to Kataev's growing skill and confidence.

In the figures of Petr Ivanovich Sinaiskii and his father Kataev has created two complex and interesting characters without recourse to intricate psychological analysis. It must be said, though, that, as is always the case with Kataev, little purely imaginative power is involved in the characterisation. The relationship between Petr Ivanovich and his father is not necessarily the same as that between Kataev and his own father but both figures are creations of recollection and exaggeration rather than of imaginative inventiveness.

Finally, Otets is important as the work of a young author who now knows his own way in life. Like Zimoi it

recounts a crisis which, upon its resolution, leaves the hero confident of his way forward. The influence of Bunin can still be seen (as it can throughout Kataev's career) but there can be no question with Otets of slavish imitation or of lack of self-confidence.

Two minor short stories, Vosem'desyat pyat' and Ryzhie krestiki (both 1922), can best be regarded as pendants to Otets. The first of these is a very slight story of little interest, except for the theme of the interrogation of a White agent, his fear, and his sudden realisation that he has irrevocably cut himself off from life: 'Громадная непоправимая беда разделила жизнь пополам, захлебнувшись толстой дверью. По один бок ее, этой двери, кружилась безвыходным волчком и гудела темнота и тишина, а по другой бок был мир и солнце.' (1,278)

Ryzhie krestiki is a Buninesque story which restates one of the themes of Otets, namely that happiness and grief are equal manifestations of life, which is inherently good irrespective of individual experiences. The heroine, Natal'ya Ivanovna, contemplates suicide when her formerly happy life is soured by the loss of her dear ones. As she is on the point of taking poison she sees a letter which she had written many years before but had not sent. It is a love letter to a student and it contains some pressed lilac flowers which have now become little rust-coloured crosses. The sight of them causes Natal'ya Ivanovna to recall those far off days, and with sudden clarity she realises that her present unhappiness

is no less a part of life than her former happiness. The paragraph in which this idea is expressed contains the essence of Kataev's view of life at this time:

Вся ее счастливая, трудная, изумительная, невыносимая и обыкновенная человеческая жизнь представилась ей щедрым, зеркальным отражением дикого винограда в стеклах и паркете, шумом ливня, запахом сирени, и частые слезы закапали на порыжелые строчки этого неотосланного письма. И она поняла, что в жизни равны и счастье, и горе, и любовь и смерть, что нет в жизни ни взлетов, ни падений. (1,259)

Kataev appears to have had some difficulty in settling on a title for the story which is now called Zimoi. Written in Moscow early in 1923, the story first appeared under the title Pechatnyi list o sebe (glava iz povesti "Pokhozhdeniya trekh bezdel'nikov"). In the same year it appeared as Med', kotoraya torzhestvovala. Finally it was reprinted with its present title in the collection Otets (1928) and it has retained that title through all further reprintings.¹

The original title reveals much about Kataev's intention in the story, which is undisguisedly autobiographical. The brief, intense love affair with the girl from Kiev which forms the basis of the story is also the subject of a lyric poem of 1923.² However, although Zimoi can be read as at least partly autobiographical, its original subtitle indicates that the autobiographical hero is similar in conception to Eduard Tochkin, the hero of Bezdel'nik Eduard, who is a stylised

1. See the notes to the story on 1,599.

2. The poem is entitled 'Kiev' (9,603). In a conversation with the present author in 1976 Kataev recalled that the girl with whom he fell in love at this time was the sister of Bulgakov.

character based on a real person. Similarly, the hero of Zimoi is most probably an exaggerated reflection of Kataev rather than a faithful portrait.

Zimoi is the story of an intense five day long love affair between a young poet and the sister of a fellow writer who has come to Moscow from her native Kiev for a short winter holiday. While it lasts, the feverishly passionate love dominates the poet's life, preventing him from eating, sleeping or working. After the girl has returned to Kiev the poet informs her brother that he intends to marry her and, stung by the brother's incredulous scorn at his poverty, he works frantically, sells a number of stories and poems and makes a considerable sum of money. When he visits the girl in Kiev he discovers that she has returned to her former way of life; the demands of study and the fact that she has a fiance in Kiev have killed her love for the Moscow poet. However, although the love is short-lived it brings about an important change in the hero's attitude towards himself and his work; after recalling with melancholy nostalgia the heady days of the Revolution and Civil War he finally reaches a state of self-confident hope for the future. He continues to feel nostalgia for the past which has gone forever, but equally he can face the future with the sure knowledge of his own ability and independence.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Zimoi is its feverish quality which has its roots in the hero's state of health (both physical and mental) and is reflected in the short, clipped sentences:

Он ласково:

Десять.

Я твердо:

Двадцать...Я бы попросил.

У него последняя надежда.

Десять. У меня крупные.

Разменяйте. Двадцать. (1,285)

It is worth noting that the style of Zimoi, intended to convey the feverish intensity of the hero's emotions, bears a striking resemblance to the style of Vremya, vpered!, in which the predominant mood is once more one of feverish intensity, although on a much larger scale. The following typical passage from Zimoi with its staccato rhythm and its enumeration of objects is particularly close to the style of the later work:

Все или ничего. Я еду.

В чемодан летят желтые башмаки, одеколон,
белье, блокнот, туфли и последние журналы.
Билет прострелен навывлет. Метель и второй
звонок. Сутки, и шесть часов бездействия.
(1,294)

The title of the novel Vremya, vpered! was 'donated' to Kataev by Mayakovskii,¹ and Zimoi, too, recalls the work of Mayakovskii, in particular the poem Pro eto which is also about the intensity of a partly unrequited love. Pro eto was published in the first issue of the journal Lef (March 1923), which appeared one month before the publication of Zimoi. There is no evidence that Kataev was directly influenced by Pro eto, but there can be no doubt about the general influence of Mayakovskii on the style of Zimoi. One phrase is borrowed directly from Mayakovskii's poem

1. Kataev quoted by L. Skorino, Pisatel' i ego vremya, pp. 218-9.

Oblako v shtanakh ('■ перекрещенные, прожитые дни прыгают из клеток календаря, как люди из окон горящего дома').

(1,293) The comparison between love and illness; the re-establishment of bourgeois values in the NEP period; the melancholy nostalgia for the idealism of the Revolution and Civil War period - all of these features are common to Pro eto and to Kataev's story. The works differ fundamentally, however, in the upturn of hope with which both end. Mayakovskii's is an idealistic hope for the future of mankind which is touching in its naivety and ironical in view of the poet's ultimate fate. Kataev's is not at all idealistic, but rather a realistic and confident knowledge of his own place in life.

The feverishness of the style in Zimoi, with its large number of short chapters and elliptical sentences, can be ascribed to the hero's illness, which in turn is due to two factors - smoking in the open air in winter and the intensity of his love for the girl from Kiev. Kataev relates the physical and emotional causes of his hero's illness to each other by investing the action of smoking in the open air with symbolic significance:

Спички задувает ветер. Игольчатый воздух танцует и покалывает ресницы. Мундштук папиросы, на минуту вынутый изо рта, твердеет и леденеет. Сколько дней мы с ней знакомы? Кажется, пять. Пять затяжек папиросы. И между каждой затяжкой память о ней твердеет, леденеет, и страшно подумать, что вдруг завтра ее уже нельзя будет отогреть губами. (1,282)

Just as the cardboard mouthpiece of the cigarette freezes as soon as it is removed from the mouth after each of the five puffs, so does the girl freeze into the hero's memory between each of their five meetings and only his lips kissing hers can

transport her from the frozen world of memory to the warm, living world of actuality. Soon she will go away to Kiev and he will be left with no more than a cold, hard memory of her which can no longer be melted and changed by further meetings and further kisses.

One of the story's earlier titles - Med', kotoraya torzhestvovala - refers to one of its major images, the brass section of the orchestra. In the second chapter the hero finds himself in the park at the Patriarshie ponds. Penniless, hungry and lovesick, he is drawn to the one place in Moscow which he associates with the girl from Kiev, namely the tree which is their meeting place. He feels depressed by his lack of food and tobacco and by the prospect of having to wait four hours until she comes, and when he sees an acquaintance (the editor of a journal) he suggests that the brass section of an orchestra which they can hear is weeping over youth and happiness which have irrevocably disappeared. The editor, who with his comfortable home and income, has no reason to accept such an image, counters that the brass never weeps; it is always exultant. It is a contrast which is to be used several times in the story, almost like a graph to chart the mood of the editor and, more importantly, the hero. By the end of the second chapter the hero has succeeded in wresting twenty roubles from the editor, whose mood of confidence and well-being is thereby dissipated and who sadly admits that the brass does indeed weep over lost youth and happiness. At the end of the story the hero, made mature by the failure of the love affair and by his realisation that it was a turning point

in his life, reaches the conclusion that the brass section is, by turns, triumphant and tearful. In other words, he realises that the past will continue to exert a power over him, that he will continue to weep for lost youth and for the heady days of the Civil War, but that, equally, there will be times when he will look forward and, like the brass section, will be exultant.

Brainina's conclusion that Zimoi is a pessimistic work appears to overlook the final paragraph.¹ It is true that a note of pessimism pervades sections of the story, in particular the hero's journey from Kiev to Moscow during which he recalls the unforgettable days of War Communism, as irrevocable as love. But he immediately rejects the notion that love is irrevocable. Moscow awaits him and with it hope, work and the future in which the brass will weep and triumph by turns.

The past, his youth, the weeping of the brass - all of these are associated in the story with the south-west, whereas the future, his career as a writer, and the exultant notes of the orchestra are associated with Moscow. Throughout the story Moscow, cold and wintry though it may be, remains the hero's home, and it appears to give Kataev pleasure merely to list some of the Moscow street names. Moscow has become for the hero (and for Kataev) 'dear Moscow' ('milaya Moskva'). In contrast, Kiev, with its monasteries and catacombs, seems alien. The compass on the girl's desk in Kiev marks the complete distinction between north and south: 'sever i yug vechny.' (1,296) Its thirty degree deviation points straight at Moscow and marks

1. B. Brainina, Valentin Kataev, p. 24.

the unbridgeable distance between the girl and the hero, between his past and his future. When he takes his final leave of the girl he again emphasises the geographical, as well as the emotional, distance between them:

Прощай. Я тебя не люблю.

Прощай.

Тебе на юго-запад, мне на северо-восток. (1,299)

In rejecting Kiev the hero is rejecting the religion of that city, which he had once adhered to: 'Меня ждет Москва. Я не люблю и не хочу знать твоей Византии: мне нужно бороться а не молиться.' (1,299)

Thus the underlying theme of Zimoi is similar to that of Otets, namely the process of maturing and the growing self-confidence of the hero; and as in Otets the hero looks forward to a new stage of his life while still trying to find a true perspective for his past. Both Petr Ivanovich Sinaiskii and the unnamed hero of Zimoi stand at an important juncture in their lives. For both, the most pressing problem is to strike a balance between the past and the future, to find a context for past experiences which will allow for growth and freshness in the years to come. In both cases a geographical distinction between south and north serves as a correlate to past and future, in that while the south will always remain a part of life for both heroes (and will be associated with youth) the north is full of potential for the future, and the move from one centre to the other acts as a purging and invigorating force.

In several minor respects Zimoi anticipates later works, especially the works of the 1960s. As in the later works, Kataev is fascinated by the workings of memory. Scenes become imprinted

on memory as though illuminated by a flash of magnesium, and once imprinted they cannot be erased.¹ The associative powers of memory, so evocatively used by Kataev in Svyatoi kolodets, Trava zabven'ya and Kubik is also present in Zimoi, for as soon as the hero remembers the golden gates of the Kiev monastery he is transported back to a hot day during his childhood when he and his father had visited Kiev and he had suffered a nosebleed. The entire scene with all of its sensuous awareness is linked for ever in his memory with the golden gates of the monastery.

Another feature of Zimoi which recurs in the 1960s is the idea of the indestructibility of matter and the concomitant notion that time is irrelevant: 'Да, прошлого нет. Нет настоящего, и нет будущего. Есть вечное, оно всегда. Но оно меняется.' (1,296) Or again: 'Ничто не входит и не выходит из мира. Все было, есть и будет.' (1,296)

Many of the major features of Kataev's work such as his concern for precision of description, his use of significant external detail for characterisation and certain predominant themes, such as the love of possessions, link the works of the 1960s with the earlier corpus of his work, but the essential unity of much of Kataev's work can also be seen in the recurring details which form a massive web in which works from all periods are linked. In this respect Zimoi is especially significant.

The hero recalls several earlier characters and anticipates some features of later figures such as Petya Bachei. He is a romantic dreamer who will settle for nothing less than a

1. See, for example, the following passage: 'Запугавшиеся пальцы борются с выключателем. Лампочка дает осечки. Серенький свитер, узел волос, один поворот голоса, другой поворот, блестящий и очень близкий глаз, поднятая рука, ноготь, горло, беглый поцелуй, десяток любительских фотографий на память при вспышках магния. Моментально и навсегда.' (1,295)

perfect and everlasting love and in this respect he could be called a maximalist. The girl begs him to make her decision for her by refusing to allow her to go to Kiev but he will not do so, and, in examining his own motives, he realises that this is because he views the separation as a test of their love. His ideals have been forged by the fire of the Civil War which for him was a great romantic adventure in which he knew hardship, but which remained a golden era:

Мне кричали стой, меня расстреливали, раздевали, били рукояткой револьвера...В двадцатом году я умирал от голоду в Харькове в городском саду. На мне были парусиновые штаны и бязевая рубаша. Больше у меня ничего не было...Я не унывал. Я любил эту голодную и героическую пору военного коммунизма, любил устные газеты и митинги. Я верил в будущее. (1,285,92)

The hero's attitude to the Civil War is identical to that of Kataev himself in the openly autobiographical story Chernyi khleb (1935), and is far more committed to the Revolution than the attitude of the detached heroes of Opyt Krantsa and V osazhdennom gorode.

It is significant that in a work where Kataev's personal commitment to the romantic aspect of the Revolution and Civil War is made clear the influence of Mayakovskii should predominate over that of Bunin. Kataev's first great mentor continued to influence him and much of Kataev's later work is inconceivable without Bunin, but the excitement of the revolutionary commitment (in a romanticised form) which Kataev associates with the name of Mayakovskii becomes increasingly important in his work from the middle of the 1920s.

The hero of Zimoi may be a romantic dreamer, but he is also a practical man who, when he needs money, knows how to

get it by his own efforts. Challenged by the girl's brother to make a certain sum of money in gold, he writes furiously and then uses the money obtained from publishers to win still more money at the gambling tables (in common with other heroes, notably Petya Bachei, he is blessed with good fortune). The theme of love of wealth and possessions plays an important part in the story, but Kataev's ambiguous attitude towards the love of money is diverted from the hero to the girl's brother. There is nothing shameful in the hero's need for gold. He requires it in order to obtain love which is no less essential than food or tobacco. Ivan Ivanovich, the girl's brother, on the other hand, dreams of wealth for its own sake. He admires the material wealth of the Americans and all of the technical advances which are associated with wealth. In Kataev's attitude to Ivan Ivanovich can be detected the ambiguity which is his usual response to the theme of wealth.

Zimoi and Otets have been discussed at length because, taken together, they represent an important stage in Kataev's development as a writer, and while Otets has received considerable attention from Soviet critics, Zimoi has gone virtually unnoticed. Yet such is the sincerity and personal nature of the story that it stands out as a landmark in Kataev's career, pointing forward to major works such as Rastratchiki and, much further ahead, the works of the 1960s and introducing into Kataev's works the influence of Mayakovskii both in style and, more importantly, in the committed, romantic attitude to the Revolution.

2.2.3 Ogon' and Rodion Zhukov: Early Examples of Positive Heroes?

Ogon', written in 1922, was not published until 1927, when it was included in the collection entitled Rastratchiki.¹ The hero, Erokhin, is the earliest example in Kataev's work of a committed Communist, yet the story has received very little attention from Soviet critics who have preferred to see the later Rodion Zhukov (1925) as the beginning of a new tendency in Kataev's work towards 'positive' heroes. The significance of Erokhin does not lie so much in the fact that he is a Communist, as that he is an imagined character not based on Kataev's own experience. He represents a partial departure from the type of hero who had predominated in Kataev's fiction. Unlike Eduard Tochkin, Petr Sinaiskii, and the young hero of V osazhdennom gorode, Erokhin is a hard-headed practical man, sure of himself and his role in life until a tragic accident robs him of his young wife.

The typically terse opening sentence serves both to introduce the plot as succinctly as possible and to intrigue the reader: 'У коммуниста Ерохина сгорела жена Катя.' (1,260) Until the death of his wife, Erokhin carries out his work of writing anti-religious pamphlets with great energy and total conviction. Katya's death and his unbearable grief deprive him, at least temporarily, of the certainty that the priests are wrong and that he is right. While wandering around the town in a delirium he finds himself drawn to the church, which

1. V. Kataev, Rastratchiki (L., 1927).

he enters just in time to hear the priest denounce him and thank God for killing his wife. So powerful an emotion does this evoke in him that he feels compelled to go to the priest's home in order to discuss his wife's death. There he desperately asserts that her death was not a divine punishment but simply an accident, of a type which will be eradicated in the future when electricity replaces oil as the basic fuel. Finally, he leaves the priest's home and returns to his hut to write another anti-religious pamphlet. Overcome by exhaustion, he stumbles into bed, but in his sleep continues to think about the pamphlet, and dreams of floating higher and higher through the atmosphere to colder and colder regions in search of a God and angels who are not there. There is no God, and no angels; there is only death.

Although Erokhin cannot be compared with the heroes of the preceding short stories, there is a sense in which he is not completely dissimilar. Like most of Kataev's heroes Erokhin is a man whose life is disrupted so severely that his normal thought processes and way of looking at the world are upset. The death of his wife places him under a great mental strain, in the process of which the rational, materialistic basis of his whole life is called into question. The dream which he has at the end of the story is as skilfully handled as anything which came from Kataev's pen in the creative period of the 1920s. Erokhin passes imperceptibly from consciousness to sleep in a way which recalls Chartkov's dreams in Gogol's Portret. (The influence of Gogol' may be discerned in several of Kataev's works of the period, notably Rodion Zhukov and

Rastratchiki.) Realism, stemming from the continuation of Erokhin's anti-religious thought, and fantasy, springing from the hallucinatory effect of floating ever upwards from the earth into the realms of icy darkness towards the blazing disc of the sun, combine in Kataev's characteristically fluid prose in which shapes and colours constantly change. The motifs of ice and fire which occur throughout the story are here intertwined, culminating in the short final chapter: 'Где же ангелы? Где же бог? Их нет и здесь. Все - темная, поповская ложь. Холод. Лед. Молчание. Огонь. Смерть.' (1,274)

Apart from the blend of realism and fantasy, Ogon' is notable for the excellent characterisation of Erokhin in whom the war between conscious and subconscious, between the rational and the irrational is skilfully and economically conveyed. Particularly interesting is Erokhin's desperate assertion of the indestructibility of matter. 'Он задыхался. Огонь...Переход материи...из одного состояния в другое... Взрыв...Техническая отсталость...Пережиток.' (1,272) A similar preoccupation with the law of conservation of matter and its import for human life and death can be found elsewhere in Kataev's works, especially in Svyatoi kolodets and Trava zabven'ya.

Until Rodion Zhukov (1925) the heroes of all of Kataev's mature stories belonged to the same generation as the author himself. With Rodion Zhukov Kataev turned for the first time

to an earlier generation, and a subject which was already history. (Although, significantly, Kataev's own childhood recollections and experiences provided many of the details, so that not all is imagined.) A possible source for Rodion Zhukov is an article entitled 'Matyushenko' by A. L'vov which appeared in the Odessa newspaper Moryak in 1922.¹ Kataev was for a while associated with the newspaper and may well have been acquainted with L'vov or have read the article.² L'vov's description of Matyushenko bears a certain resemblance to that of Zhukov. Matyushenko's regret that the "Potemkin" surrendered is echoed by Kataev's hero. Finally Matyushenko's fate was similar to that of Zhukov. Unable to bear living abroad he returned to Odessa, was captured and executed at Sevastopol'.³ Whether or not L'vov's article provided Kataev with material for Rodion Zhukov there seems little doubt that the historical personage of Matyushenko was in the author's mind during the writing of the story.

Rodion Zhukov is a member of the crew of the battleship "Potemkin" who, finding life unbearable in Rumania where the mutinous crew surrendered, returns to his homeland and is arrested as he steps ashore at Odessa. The major part of the story concerns Zhukov's journey on foot and by ferry boat from Constanza to Odessa, and, as in the case of Rastratchiki and

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1. A. L'vov, 'Matyushenko', Moryak, 22 June 1922.
 2. On Moryak and Kataev's involvement in it see M. Polyanskiy, 'Most cherez desyatiletie', Literaturnaya Rossiya, 22 October 1965. See also Polyanskiy's 'Pyatitsyachnyi moryak', Literaturnaya gazeta, 15 September 1964.
 3. L'vov's description of Matyushenko is as follows: 'Широкое - с отчетливо намеченными скулами - светловолосое и дышащее сразу осязаемой твердостью - это лицо заставляет на себе остановиться. Особенно поразительно глаза: небольшие, но острые, как товедские клинки и мгновенно вспыхивающие и погасающие, словно под ресницами у них укрыт потайной фонарь.'
- A. L'vov, 'Matyushenko'.

several other works, the form of Rodion Zhukov illustrates Kataev's liking for a travelling hero. A work in which the hero is on a journey gives Kataev the opportunity to describe the landscape in its dynamic aspect both with regard to the time of day and the different places visited by the hero.

As in Rastratchiki, the influence of Gogol' can be clearly discerned in Rodion Zhukov. However, whereas a Gogolian style is wholly appropriate for Rastratchiki, adding greatly to its meaning, the use of Gogolian syntax in Rodion Zhukov is not justified by the story, and the descriptions of the hero, which lean heavily on the nineteenth century author, remain stylistically unintegrated.

Although Zhukov regrets the surrender of the "Potemkin", and although he intends to work as an underground revolutionary upon his return to Russia, he is by no means the self-confident Communist hero of the same name who appears in the later tetralogy Volny Chernogo morya. His desire to return to his homeland is prompted less by the wish to continue the revolutionary struggle than by an instinctive longing for home. Significantly, the predominant leitmotif in the story (one with which the hero is closely associated) is blindness. Even before the onset of his fever Rodion's journey has taken on the features of a blind man's walk: 'И еще меньше, чем в Румынии, знал Родион о том, что делается в России, - и шел наугад, одиноко и тревожно, как слепой, без усталости, лишь бы поскорее дойти до Днестровского лимана.' (1,314)

On reaching the Danube, he comes across a group of boys on the seashore wading in a shallow pool and catching fresh

water fish which have been swept out to sea and blinded by the salt water. Zhukov also plunges into the water to catch some fish and, as a result, he falls ill with a fever. The fish, swept along and blinded, are symbolic of Zhukov who acts purely by instinct and who, like the blind fish, is swept into a trap from which he cannot escape. It is particularly appropriate that the blind fish which are symbolic of Zhukov's plight should also be responsible for his fever which intensifies the impression that he is helplessly blind. Finally, on board the steamer from Akkerman to Odessa, Zhukov encounters four sinister blind Jews in bowler hats and dark glasses.¹ Once again their blindness is symbolic of Zhukov's own condition, both spiritual and physical. In the last few paragraphs of the story Zhukov subsides into complete oblivion: 'Но ничего этого не видел Родион...Ношуба побежал с перекошенным лицом по забытому трапу...И Родион перестал видеть.' (1,327)

In his fever Zhukov follows in the tradition already set by Kataev and commented on several times in this chapter. The normal passage of time and movement in space which had been carefully established earlier in the tale give way in the second half of the story to a condition in which individual incidents stand in complete isolation from one another. Zhukov's recollections of the mutiny on board the "Potemkin" become interspersed with the people and the places he is actually seeing on his journey back to Odessa. Once again, as in so many earlier tales, Kataev blends realism and fantasy to create

1. These incidental characters reappear in Beleet parus odinokii.

an effect on the reader similar to the ending of Ogon' or to Ser Genri i chert, namely that of floating in a half-real world.

Despite the idiosyncratic use of Gogolian syntax, the characterisation of the hero in Rodion Zhukov is excellent, Kataev succeeding in combining certain features of his earlier heroes with a peasant stubbornness and simplicity. Even although he alone returns to his native land, he remains essentially a passive being, confused by the sudden changes in his way of life which the mutiny and its aftermath have wrought. The impression of passivity is greatly heightened by the disorientating effect of Zhukov's illness. As he stumbles almost blindly towards Akkerman his life seems to be entirely in the hands of the people he meets, such as the cook who refuses to buy his fish. Zhukov's helplessness and passivity is used incidentally by Kataev to sharpen the contrast between the "Potemkin" mutineer and the two comfortable middle-class gentlemen whom he comes across after the onset of his fever and whose purely theoretical discussion of the plight of the masses is juxtaposed to Zhukov's own pitiful condition. Finally, the pathos of Zhukov's arrest is increased by his complete helplessness and the strangely incongruous tenderness of the moustachioed policeman: 'Пошел, - сказал усатый человек, стоя на подножке извозчика и нежно поддерживая вялое, тяжелое от обморока и в то же время как бы опустошенное тело Родиона.' (1,327)

Kataev sympathises with Zhukov but his attitude and approach to characterisation are very different from the later

Beleet parus odinokii in which Zhukov is not captured but outwits the police and becomes a very active and successful revolutionary. To some extent the difference in characterisation may be explained by the fact that Beleet parus odinokii was intended as a work for children, but more significant is the difference both in the general literary climate in 1925 and 1936, and in Kataev's own attitude towards committed writing (two factors which are closely related). In 1925 it was perfectly acceptable to portray a character such as Zhukov as the passive victim of circumstances, whereas in 1936 such a view, which did not conform to the current practice, i.e. Socialist Realism, was unacceptable. This point is stressed here because the significance of Rodion Zhukov in Kataev's development as a Soviet writer (in the sense of an active supporter of the Soviet regime) has been consistently overstressed by Soviet critics. Although Brainina and Skorino discuss the differences between Rodion Zhukov and Beleet parus odinokii, the picture of the short story which emerges from their work is greatly affected by the hindsight provided by the novel of 1936.¹ Rodion Zhukov may be seen as a significant step for Kataev because of his use of a historical setting and an unfamiliar type of hero, characteristics which were to become important for the works written in the 1930s, but to see Rodion Zhukov as a direct precursor of Beleet parus odinokii and Ya, syn trudovogo naroda is to ignore very important differences in characterisation and in the author's attitude to his hero.

1. B. Brainina, Valentin Kataev, p. 29; L. Skorino, Pisatel' i ego vremya, p. 267.

2.2.4 Rebenok

A further advance in the range of Kataev's ability as a short story writer was made in the story Rebenok (1929), the most successful feature of which is the realistic and charming characterisation. The story is potentially sentimental, but by the warmth of his humour Kataev manages to avoid that pitfall and evokes sympathy for his characters. Polechka works as a domestic help for a music teacher and conductor called Lyudvig Yakovlevich Knigge and, after quarrelling with her landlady, she moves, unbidden, into his room, sleeping behind the curtain which divides it into two sections. Despite the differences in their ages and interests Polechka and Lyudvig Yakovlevich fall in love, but neither dares admit it to the other. One evening Polechka visits the theatre, and the sight of Lyudvig Yakovlevich in his black suit conducting the orchestra intensifies her feeling for him so much that when both are in bed that evening she groans with passion. Her employer, however, mistaking her groans for the symptoms of a real fever, rushes through to her part of the room and calls to a neighbour to bring in some medicine. After this incident Polechka's work deteriorates and she becomes pregnant by the local barber Max, who plans to use the fact that she lives in the same room as Lyudvig Yakovlevich to obtain a paternity order against the conductor. To Max's astonishment and Polechka's incredulous delight, Lyudvig Yakovlevich admits responsibility for the child in court and expresses his willingness to marry Polechka.

That the publication of a story on such a theme at the height of RAPP's assault on Fellow Travellers would be likely

to call forth a vigorous protest may be inferred from the curiously defensive editorial note accompanying the story on its appearance in the journal 30 dnei:

Темой новеллы Валентина Катаева является на первый взгляд незначительный бытовой факт. Но это трагикомическое происшествие рассказано с такой тонкой иронией и наблюдательностью, что типы новеллы вызывают не только живое внимание и интерес читателя, но и заставляют задуматься над некоторыми явлениями нашей повседневности.¹

There can be little doubt that in the climate of near hysterical debate, of sotszakaz, and of extremely strongly worded attacks on writers of lyric poetry, a story like Rebenok would be seen by RAPP critics as dangerously individual, even anti-social. So it proved to be. Rebenok was the last major story to be written by Kataev before Mashbits-Verov in his extremely critical article 'Na grani' reviewed the whole of the author's work of the 1920s and came to the conclusion that Kataev was on the very brink of becoming an enemy of Soviet society by virtue of the irrelevance of his work to the current problems faced by that society.²

It is fitting that Kataev's last major story (as opposed to satirical feuilletons) of the 1920s should be Rebenok, for although it may not be the best work of the 1920s it does illustrate most of the principal features which distinguish Kataev's work of the period.

The characters of Polechka and Lyudvig Yakovlevich are skilfully if superficially drawn by means of two devices

1. See the note on the story on 1,600.

2. See the next chapter for a discussion of Mashbits-Verov's article.

which had by this time become standard features of Kataev's method: the revelation of personality by means of external detail, and a warmly humorous attitude to the characters. The first of these may be seen in Lyudvig Yakovlevich's liking for sweets, or more subtly, in the description of the daily routine of changing for the evening performance, where the excitement which both characters feel at the highly charged situation is conveyed by the detail of Lyudvig Yakovlevich's boots falling to the floor because, in his anxiety not to touch Polechka's hand he lets them go just before she manages to catch hold of them. This section also serves as an example of the author's humorous attitude towards his characters, as does the fact that although Lyudvig Yakovlevich pretends, out of a sense of modesty, not to have noticed that Polechka has moved into his room, he begins to call at the barber's shop on his way home. Above all, the central scene in which Lyudvig Yakovlevich mistakes the signs of Polechka's passion for symptoms of a real illness is handled with a delicate good humour which reveals Kataev's fondness for his naive characters.

The other side of Kataev's humour - his satirical bent - is also present in Rebenok, in a scene in which a capricious prima donna singer comes to the flat to rehearse with Lyudvig Yakovlevich. Polechka's open-mouthed naivety contrasts with the singer's brash self-confidence and petulant outbursts. Kataev's own experience of theatrical life at this time was particularly stormy and his story Avtor, written in the same year as Rebenok, is a humorous and mildly satirical picture of the relations between a young author and the major figures in

a famous theatre (clearly intended to be the Moscow Arts Theatre).¹ Obviously, the caprices of the theatrical profession were uppermost in Kataev's mind in 1929, with the result that the prima donna scene, which is not strictly necessary for the development of Rebenok, was included as a satirical cameo which, incidentally, reveals a new side of Lyudvig Yakovlevich's character.

In Rebenok Kataev evokes, no less than in the satirical stories Nozhi and Veshchi, the atmosphere of Moscow in the second half of the 1920s. Despite certain hardships, such as the pressing shortage of housing, it is a happy, stable society as presented by Kataev. Indeed, the housing shortage leads to a happy conclusion in Rebenok as it does in the play Kvadratura kruga. It is a world in which there is time for visits to the theatre or the amusement park, and if the desire for wealth and possessions leaves behind its victims such as Georgii (Veshchi), for such as Pashka and Lyudmila (Nozhi) and Polechka and Lyudvig Yakovlevich (Rebenok) there is love and relative prosperity. But it is also a world of contradictions, a world which provides ample scope for the talented if still somewhat amiable satirist which Kataev reveals himself to be in Rastratchiki and the many satirical feuilletons of the period.

Yet the stability of Moscow of the late 1920s as depicted by Kataev was more apparent than real. Significantly,

1. V. Kataev, Avtor, 2, 197-209.

in Olesha's Zavist' (1927) the kind of settings favoured by Kataev (pubs, a football stadium, the leafy back streets of Moscow in summer) coexist with vast building sites. The face of Moscow, of the USSR and of Russian literature was changing, and Olesha's novel stands poised sensitively between two epochs. The new period of socialist construction does not find an echo in Kataev's prose of the late 1920s, although it does form the subject matter of his work of the early 1930s, including the novel Vremya, vpered! But before going on to discuss Kataev's change of direction in the 1930s, it is necessary to look at another aspect of his work of the 1920s - his satire.

CHAPTER THREE

Satirical Works of the 1920s

3.1 Introduction

Soviet satire flourished during the NEP era, when authors such as Mayakovskii, Zoshchenko, Kol'tsov, and Il'f and Petrov produced sharply satirical stories, verses and sketches (fel'etony) aimed at the evident contradictions in Soviet society. The best Soviet satire of this period was that written by men who were passionately concerned to improve their fellow creatures, either politically or morally. For Mayakovskii and Kol'tsov the passionate concern which inspires satire is political; for Zoshchenko it is moral; in the case of Il'f and Petrov it is, perhaps, misleading to speak of passion, but behind the humour and the sympathy for the clever rogue, Bender, can be felt a spirit of rectitude - a political orthodoxy.

Some writers, however, do not have either Mayakovskii's political conviction or Zoshchenko's moral concern. Of them it has been said: 'The lack of a consistent moral or ideological base is what vitiates the work of many contemporary satirists.'¹ With few exceptions Kataev's satirical works of the 1920s lack the firm moral or ideological base which Henry sees as being essential to the best Soviet satire. As comedy his work of this period is excellent, but its effectiveness as satire is weakened somewhat by the absence of a sense of outrage.

In the 1930s (and, to a lesser extent, towards the end of the 1920s) Kataev began to adopt a political attitude which

1. P. Henry, Classics of Soviet Satire (London, 1972), p. vii.

might have provided the incisiveness which his satire lacked, but by then he had stopped writing satirical stories, for reasons which will be examined in this chapter.

3.2 Zolotoe pero

Despite the reservations expressed above, it must be admitted that the place of satire in Kataev's works is not inconsiderable. In the West he has sometimes been considered primarily as a satirist.¹ The first indication of an interest in satire comes in the very early story Temnaya lichnost', which is sub-titled 'a satirical story'.² But the first significant satirical story is Zolotoe pero, written while he was working for UkrROSTA and published in the Khar'kov newspaper Kommunist.³ Its importance lies in the fact that the object of satire is none other than Kataev's mentor, Bunin, whom he professed to love and admire. The dilemma which is examined in Trava zabven'ya can be seen in embryo in the two portraits of Bunin in Muzyka and Zolotoe pero. The former portrait is lyrical, finely observed, and infused with warm feeling for the great writer and with just a hint of irony; the latter is sharply critical of Bunin's attitude to the Revolution.

The central figure in Zolotoe pero is Academician Shevelev - a thin disguise for Bunin - who, at a time when

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1. B.G. Guerney calls Kataev 'primarily a satirist and humorist', Russian Literature in the Soviet Period from Gorki to Pasternak (New York, 1960), p. 355. E.J. Brown has written: 'Valentin Katayev (1897-) might very well be treated as a satirist.', Russian Literature since the Revolution, p. 133.
 2. V. Kataev, Temnaya lichnost' (Odessa, 1912) (issued as a separate booklet by K. De-Morei).
 3. Kommunist, 2 October 1921. See p. 429 of the present study for further comment on the significance of the circumstances in which Zolotoe pero was first published.

the city in which he lives is about to fall to the Reds, locks himself in his study to write a story about a dying prince. No one is allowed to interrupt him, and he leaves his study just twice a day, once for his customary walk and once for dinner. When the position has already become hopeless, he agrees to help the White Commander by writing an article for the local newspaper calling on the people to resist the Reds. But the city falls to the besieging army, and Shevelev's life is spared only because of his importance to Russian literature.¹

The portrait of Academician Shevelev is of an aristocrat with long, parchment-coloured fingers and a bony, aquiline skull. During his daily walks he mingles with the common people, of whom he is reputed to have an intimate understanding, but, in fact, he is so preoccupied with polishing the language of his story that he fails to observe their true feelings towards him. His status as a writer, and, particularly, as a stylist, is never in doubt; he is known and respected throughout Russia. But his purely aesthetic concerns separate him from the world around him, and there exists an unbridgeable gap between the economically written, highly polished lines about the dying prince on the one hand, and the fate of the town and its inhabitants on the other. Shevelev spends so much time thinking about the former that

1. Several of the details in Zolotoe pero are repeated in Trava zabven'ya, for example, the story of Bunin's narrow escape from the Cheka. Vera Nikolaevna Bunina's diary makes it clear that Bunin did, indeed, write a dangerous article on the eve of the Bolshevik entry into Odessa in April 1919 (M. Greene (ed.), Ustami Buninykh, p. 221).

he is blind to the true position in the town and, more importantly, to the true wishes of the inhabitants.

When he writes the article supporting the Whites, Shevelev changes from a cold, detached artist pursuing purely aesthetic ends into a fanatical and dangerous enemy of the common people. This change is signalled by a move from words denoting coldness, stiffness and aristocratic detachment (with which Kataev describes his character in the early part of the tale) to words denoting passionate anger. At first Shevelev has a 'tverdoe, dervyannoe litso'; his habits are completely regular ('eti privychki byli neodolimy'). (1,159-60) Later, when confronted by the Communists, he reveals a surprising passion: 'Он сжал кулаки и с поднятой головой и сверкающими глазами, готовый перегрызть горло каждому, кто переступит порог его комнаты, ждал конца.' (1,164)

The writer's detachment from current events in the pursuit of artistic perfection and his assumption of a counter-revolutionary stand are not unconnected, for it is his devotion to art which blinds him to reality:

Он задавал вопросы и заивчивал народные словечки. Много было в этих беглых вопросах значительного и угрожающего, много в ответах было злости и хитрого яду, но ничего не замечал академик, занятый умирающим князем и шлифуя стиль складывающихся в уме фраз. (1,159)¹

1. Kataev is here satirising a feature of Bunin's art which the older writer himself freely admits. In a passage from *Zhizn' Arsen'eva* Bunin describes what he once observed in a cafe: 'На Московской я заходил в извозничью чайную, сидел в ее говоре, тесноте и парном тепле, смотрел на мясистые, алые лица, на рыжие бороды, на ржавый шелушащийся поднос, на котором стояли передо мной два белых чайника с мокрыми веревочками, привязанными к их крышечкам и ручкам. Наблюдение народного быта? Ошибаетесь - только вот этого подноса, этой мокрой веревочки.' I.A. Bunin, *Sobranie sochinenii v devyati tomakh*, vol. 6, p. 234.

Zolotoe pero is unusual in the corpus of Kataev's satire of the 1920s in being based on character rather than situation. The figure of Shevelev is well drawn, partly by means of the Gogolian device of identifying the character with an object. Thus, the academician and the gold nib of his pen become synonymous. There seems little doubt that Kataev's closeness to Bunin enables him to portray Shevelev convincingly, albeit in a negative light.

In contrast to Shevelev, whom Kataev understands, the band of Red soldiers and sailors remain pure stereotypes, and the attempt to give them positive features harms the artistic quality of the work.

Академик подошел к окну. Он ясно видел этих веселых оборванных солдат с красными бантами и кожаные куртки матросов. Звуки грубых башмаков по замерзшему асфальту гулко и твердо отдавались в тонких голубоватых стеклах особняка. Отряд приближался. Матросы деловито читали номера домов, придерживая кожаные шнуры револьверов.
(1,164)

These lines contain an unfortunate confusion in the point of view. Kataev appears to be using Shevelev's viewpoint ('on yasno videl') yet the soldiers and sailors are 'jolly' - an adjective which is hardly appropriate for the threatened Shevelev. This confusion, and the hackneyed picture of the Bolsheviks, suggests Kataev's lack of knowledge of these people. His attitude of sympathy towards them fails to convince.

Zolotoe pero was written at a time when Kataev was involved in the heady, romantic work which he describes in Chernyi khleb and when he came under the influence of Sergei Ingulov. The fact that, in these circumstances, he was prepared to satirise a man whom he loved and respected and to

express sympathy for people whom he clearly did not understand, does not mean that he had irrevocably chosen the path of support for the regime at this early date. His contemporary non-satirical work shows that Kataev, while certainly less detached than Bunin, could not be described as a committed supporter of the regime at this time.

3.3 Short Satirical Sketches of the First Half of the 1920s

The satirical sketches which Kataev published in Gudok and other newspapers in the 1920s were frequently written in response to a news item or a reader's letter. At their base may lie a real incident and they often bear an extract from a news item as an epigraph. For example, one of the best of the sketches - Beremennyi muzhchina - begins with the incident on which it is based recounted in the language of the news item:

На дорожной конференции Северной делегатка Кулаева, выступив в прениях по докладу дорздравотдела, указала на случай в вологодском приемном покое, где вследствие перегруженности работой врач в больничном листе поставил рабочему диагноз - "беременна". На линии врачам приходится обслуживать в сутки до 150 человек. (Из одной стенограммы) (2,329)

Taking this incident as his subject, Kataev writes a dialogue between a male patient and a harassed doctor who persistently diagnoses pregnancy. The sketch ends with a switch of voice and a plea to ease the doctor's load:

Шутки шуткам, товарищи, но при такой нагрузке врачей нетрудно и до того докатиться, что весь мужской персонал на транспорте начнет рожать... Уж лучше бы какой-нибудь соответствующий мужчина раз навсегда родил мероприятие по разгрузке линейных врачей от непосильной работы. (2,331)

In several respects Beremennyi muzhchina is typical of the majority of Kataev's satirical sketches of this period. Firstly, there is little or no description of scene or character. Only the situation (normally arising from the epigraph) is developed, and that purely by means of dialogue. Secondly, the situation is basically ridiculous and lends itself to a comic treatment. Thirdly, the satire is mild and good-humoured.

The first of these points may be illustrated from almost any of Kataev's sketches, so general is it. The use of dialogue is excellent, but the dependence upon the situation frequently means that the sketches fail to go beyond the particular incident to the more general problem. This, in itself, helps to explain the second point - Kataev's preference for a funny situation such as those in Borodatyi malyutka, in which a reporter photographs a bearded baby in order to attract readers to his newspaper and then shaves the child to prevent other newspapers from printing the story, or Kozel v ogorode, in which a speaker at an abstinence rally is himself drunk, and only interests his listeners when he gives them a recipe for home-made alcoholic drinks.

On the surface Kataev's sketches bear a resemblance to those of Zoshchenko, but, in fact, the work of the two authors has very different sources. The ludicrous stories recounted by Zoshchenko are the work of a frustrated idealist - a man with a tragic view of his fellow men. Kataev, on the other hand, is struck only by the ridiculous side of the

gulf between aspirations and reality. A few more examples will serve to illustrate the point.

In Vyderzhal the practice of examining employees on political matters is held up to ridicule. Diabetov, a clerk in a Soviet commercial organisation, desperately tries to learn a mass of political information parrot fashion so that he can survive a purge of 'politically illiterate' employees. In the event, he becomes so confused that his answers do not correspond with the questions posed, with amusing results:

- Как ваша фамилия, товарищ? - спросил председатель комиссии.
- Маркс, - твердо ответил кассир.
- Сколько вам лет?
- Сто.
- Род занятий?
- Служение буржуазии в маске социализма. (2,99-100)

The humour here, and in most stories, is mild and good-natured. In Chudo kooperatsii the only satirical point comes in the juxtaposition of the title (a commonly used Soviet slogan extolling the virtues of collective labour) and the subject matter - the inability of a court to decide between four 'suspects' in a paternity suit.

Samoubiitsa ponevole is an old tale given a new satirical twist by being set in Soviet Russia at a time when the quality of consumer products was lamentable. Having become disillusioned with the Soviet way of life, a citizen decides to commit suicide. However, the rope with which he intends to hang himself breaks, as does the nail to which he ties it. A knife proves insufficiently stout to injure him,

and a box of matches contains so few that he is unable to poison himself. Even the simplest method of all - running at a brick wall with his head - fails, because the wall collapses. When the mood of despair leaves him and he no longer wishes to commit suicide, he eats some contaminated sausage and dies of food poisoning.

In all of these tales, which are representative of Kataev's work in the genre, bitterness and a hard edge to the satire are entirely absent. The two subjects which do bring a harsher tone to Kataev's writing are foreigners who denigrate the Soviet Union, and komchvanstvo, the abuse of Party membership or working class status. In Upryamyi amerikanets an American tries to prove that ninety nine per cent of Russians do not have shirts to wear under their jackets. The hero of Zagadochnyi Sasha imagines that his proletarian origins will suffice to ensure him entry to an institute of higher education. His friends are amazed when they see him do no preparatory work, but he remains convinced that he already has the only qualification necessary.

- Там, на экзамене, разберут, кто знает, и кто не знает. Ного принять, а кого не принять. Будьте уверенки!
- Да ведь ты будешь молчать как пень.
- Ничего-с! Авось кое-что скажу-с...Может, и найдется словечко. А мне, между прочим, на экзамены наплевать. Прошли те времена, когда непманские сыночки...Эх, да что зря трепаться! Сами увидите. (2,102)

The hero of Tovarishch Probkin designates his own house a commune ('obraztsovaya kommuna imeni Oktyabr'skoi revolyutsii') and furnishes it on official money. He even takes excursion parties round the 'model commune'.

Пробкин самодовольно снял пенсне и повел нас дальше.

- Пожалуйте. Клуб имени Октябрьской революции. Прошу убедиться. Пианино. Видите надпись: "Музыкальная секция". Затем небольшая марксистская библиотечка. Станюкович, Метерлинк, Мамин-Сибиряк, Надсон и все такое. Исключительно издания Маркса. Попугай в клетке. Аквариум с золотыми рыбками - зоологическая секция. На столе журналы...хе-хе! Все как полагается. Здесь члены коммуны могут проводить свое время в приятном и полезном отдыхе... (2,85)¹

The members of the commune who enjoy such splendid facilities are Probkin and his family.

The early prose satirical sketches illustrate the thesis that Kataev was a fine humourist with a keen eye for ridiculous situations and a good ear for dialogue, but that his inherent good humour, his lack of a firm ideological viewpoint and his sympathy for the opportunists whom he portrays all reduced the satirical impact of his work.

3.4 Two Parody Adventure Novels

The satirical novels Ostrov Erendorf and Povelitel' zheleza demonstrate clearly Kataev's love of parody, and the influence on him of Western popular novelists such as Jules Verne, H.G. Wells and Conan Doyle. Both of Kataev's works are adventure novels with satirical and parody elements in them, and were written to attract readers to a provincial newspaper: 'В отделе печати задумались - провинция плохо читает газеты. Решили печатать остросюжетные романы с продолжениями. Искали авторов. Сергей Ингулов вызвал

1. The name Marx here refers to a well-known firm of publishers.

меня и других югрословцев. Я написал "Остров Эрендорф", понравилось. Роман сатиричен.' (2,618)

Ostrov Erendorf and Povelitel' zheleza can be read as adventure novels with an anti-capitalist slant in the style of the popular works by Yakov Okunev and others.¹ But, while utilising the conventions of the genre, Kataev parodies it; in the opening chapters of Ostrov Erendorf, for example, he lists the conventions which the reader has now come to expect of this type of novel and assures him that he will not be disappointed.

Здесь будет вполне уместно сказать читателю несколько слов по поводу авантюрного романа вообще и этого в частности.

Прочитавши с первых строк о престарелом профессоре, который производит какие-то очень сложные вычисления, затем взволнованно трет сидящие виски большим профессорским платком, читатель, конечно, имеет полное право отнести к моему роману скептически и бросить его читать с первой же страницы. Возражать против этого трудно. Разумеется, читатель уже наперед знает, что профессор делает гениальное открытие, которое должно облагодетельствовать человечество. Конечно, негодяи похищают формулы и чертежи, заготовленные простодушным ученым в одном экземпляре... (2,489-90)

All of the elements mentioned are, indeed, in the novel, the plot of which concerns the discovery by an eminent geologist that tidal waves will soon destroy the entire world, with the exception of a tiny island in the Atlantic Ocean. In his

1. In Okunev's novel Gryadushchii mir (Petrograd, 1923) a scientist discovers the secret of anabiosis and uses it to preserve the life of his daughter and a young man. When they awaken from their state of suspended animation in two hundred years it is to a world in which socialist ideals have been put into practice. In the same author's Zavtrashnii den' (M., 1924) the great capitalists who control the world are overthrown in a worldwide revolution. The two elements of revolution and scientific advance occur frequently in Soviet literature of this period.

concern to save mankind he takes his discovery to Matapal', the world's most powerful capitalist, who is engaged in a desperate struggle with trade unionists under their leader Paich. Matapal' realises that capitalism is doomed in the face of the rising tide of socialism, and he sees in the professor's discovery an opportunity to create a perfect capitalist society on the island. However, at the end of the novel only the island is destroyed; the rest of the world remains untouched by the sea. The mistake arose because the firm which produced the professor's adding machine inadvertently transposed the plus and minus signs!

The history of the Soviet satirical novel began in 1922 with the publication of Erenburg's Neobychainye pokhozhdeniya Khulio Khurenito i ego uchenikov, and chief among the models for Kataev's novel is Erenburg (both Khulio Khurenito and Trest D.E.: Istoriya gibeli Evropy).¹ In the latter work a group of powerful American capitalists, very similar in conception to Matapal', set up a society for the destruction of Europe. One of them, a Mister Jebbs, closely resembles Matapal', in that both organise their lives to a very strict timetable. They both set aside one hour per day for the purpose of interviewing inventors whose ideas might prove useful to their capitalist empires; both are surrounded by secretaries and lackeys; in their world a man's wealth is the most important thing about him: 'Роскошный ланей оглядел профессора и его дочь взглядом опытного оценщика и нашел, что оба посетителя не стоят вместе и 500 000 долларов.' (2,515)

1. The title of Kataev's novel - Ostrov Erendorf - appears to be a playful reference to Erenburg, and an indication of parody.

As a skit on an adventure story and as a light satire on large scale capitalism, Ostrov Ereendorf succeeds very well. The failure of the novel lies in the treatment of Paich and the other striking workers. While the strike of New York trade unionists remains an element of the adventure plot on the same level as Professor Grant's discovery, it forms an integral part of the work, but when Kataev tries to make a political point out of the strike it leads him to use a rhetorical style which is incompatible with the dominant playful, parodying tone of the work: 'Вы даёте честное слово, что примете все меры, имеющиеся в вашем распоряжении, для спасения населения всего земного шара, без различия классов?' (2,522)

Povelitel' zheleza, published in 1925, closely resembles Ostrov Ereendorf. Like the earlier novel, its primary distinction lies in its parody of a number of popular literary genres, and its satirical point remains secondary. The plot is more complex, although the basic elements are retained, namely a clash between capitalists and workers (in Calcutta this time) and a scientific discovery which will affect the future of mankind. The 'sovereign of iron' of the title is a Moscow scientist who has acquired a machine which will magnetise all metal objects, and so render ineffective all machinery, including armaments. Sickened by his experiences in the First World War, he retreats to Tibet, from where he issues a warning to all governments to stop fighting. Unfortunately, his machine seems likely to thwart a revolution in

India until he is discovered and defeated. The two major sub-plots involve Stanley Holmes, the nephew of Sherlock Holmes, who is engaged to track down the Indian revolutionary leader Ramashandra, and Korolev, a Moscow journalist who attempts to find the mysterious 'sovereign of iron' in order to interview him.

Apart from the obvious debt to Jules Verne's Master of the World, Kataev's novel parodies Erenburg, Conan Doyle and the writers of popular novels about death rays and secret passages under the Kremlin. Erenburg's Trest D.E.: gibel' Evropy achieved great popularity in the early 1920s - a popularity enhanced by its adaptation for the stage and its production by Meierkhol'd in 1924. In his memoirs Erenburg recalls: 'Спектакль, однако, имел успех, и табачная фабрика "Ява" выпустила папиросы Д.Е.'¹ Kataev mocks this kind of popularity in Povelitel' zheleza:

Совершенно естественно, что немедленно же были выпущены папиросы и брюкодержатели марки "Повелитель железа". Не менее двух тысяч драматургов спешно переделывали свои комедии на предмет введения в число действующих лиц "Повелителя железа"... Все заработали на "Повелителя железа". Все были довольны.²

According to A. Vulis, one of the leading specialists in the field of Soviet satire, parody and comedy, the episode in which the journalist Korolev finds a secret tunnel leading from St. Basil's Cathedral under the Kremlin to the underground library of Ivan the Terrible parodies a series of popular

1. I. Erenburg, Lyudi, gody, zhizn' (M., 1961), p. 538.

2. V. Kataev, Povelitel' zheleza (V-Ustyug, 1925), p. 8.

novels about secret passages under Moscow. Vulis further asserts that Kataev's novel contains parodic references to a number of works about death rays which were in vogue in 1924-5.¹

A further level of parody in the novel comes with the figure of Stanley Holmes. Kataev's imitation of the style and devices of Conan Doyle is amusing, and the inept detective work of 'Holmes's nephew' provides the novel with a streak of broad humour.²

Like Ostrov Ereendorf, Povelitel' zheleza succeeds on the level of parody novel.³ However, when Kataev tries to portray positively the Indian revolutionaries struggling for power against British colonialists and capitalists he introduces a discordant note: 'И до вечера Рамашандра рассказывал своей влюбленной чудесные легенды о белом человеке, который отдал свою жизнь за счастье угнетенных. Имя того человека было - Ленин.'⁴ Ramashandra and the imperialist Colonel Hayes are unidimensional figures, the one positive and the other negative; but whereas with Stanley Holmes and the other characters lack of depth is no disadvantage, with the serious characters it emerges as a weakness. Povelitel' zheleza and Ostrov Ereendorf demonstrate that Kataev's style of humour lends

1. The novels about underground passages include G. Alekseev, Podzemnaya Moskva (M., -L., 1925) and V. Goncharov, Dolina smerti (L., 1925). Among novels on the theme of death rays are: N. Karpov, Luchi smerti (M., -L., 1925) and I. Keller and V. Girshgom, Universal'nye luchi (L., 1924). Details from A. Vulis, Sovetskii satiricheskii roman (Tashkent, 1965), p. 152.
2. By introducing Holmes into his work Kataev is undoubtedly parodying the so-called 'Red Pinkerton' vogue of the early 1920s - the creation of Soviet detective novels, notably by Marietta Shaginyan. See A. Britikov, 'Detektivnaya povest' v kontekste priklyuchencheskikh zhanrov' in V. Kovalev (ed.), Russkaya sovetskaya povest' 20-30-kh godov (L., 1976), pp. 408-53.
3. Vulis writes: '...подлинная история советского пародийного романа начинается с "Острова Эрендорфа" и "Повелителя железа"', Sovetskii satiricheskii roman, p. 149.
4. V. Kataev, Povelitel' zheleza, p. 31.

itself well to parody, but that, when he seeks to impart a political message, his lack of conviction gives a hollow ring to his words and vitiates the work as a whole.

3.5 Sketches and Satirical Stories of the Second Half of the 1920s

In most respects the sketches written by Kataev in the second half of the 1920s closely resemble those written earlier. As before, those sketches which deal with everyday social problems such as drunkenness are good-humoured rather than bitter, but sketches devoted to international affairs feature more prominently than they did earlier, and these have a harsher tone. In sketches such as Antisovetskii blok, Belogvardeiskii tsirk and Lakeiskie shtreikbrekhery (all dating from 1925-6) Kataev's patriotism provides the passionate indignation which sharpens the satirical barb. In a manner reminiscent of the work of Soviet cartoonists such as Moor, Kataev portrays the British politicians Churchill, Chamberlain, Baldwin, Henderson and MacDonald as abject lackeys of powerful capitalists and the aristocratic establishment. For example, Parad pobeditelei (1926) depicts Henderson, Baldwin and MacDonald as wrestlers and King George V as the referee who establishes the rules and allows foul holds as he wishes. This type of verbal political cartoon continued to be written by Kataev, with very little change in style, throughout the 1930s and 1940s.¹

1. All of the sketches mentioned are published in the second volume of the collected works.

The longer satirical stories (including Rastratchiki) written by Kataev in the second half of the 1920s all have money or goods as an important element. Kataev's typical attitude to the love of wealth and possessions - a curious mixture of identification with the heroes who are attracted by wealth and censure of them - has already been commented on; it remains almost constant throughout his career. In the second half of the 1920s, when Kataev's satirical output was greatest, his satirical censure of the love of wealth and possessions increased, but it never entirely subdued his sympathy for characters in the grip of an obsessive desire to be rich. Least attractive of such characters is the fairground booth owner in Nozhi (1926). In this story a young man - Pasha - visits a fairground on a fine summer evening and sees a young girl at a hoop-la stall with whom he falls instantly in love. Her father has made a fortune from his stall and is not prepared to see his daughter marry an ordinary worker like Pasha. Seeing no other way to secure his happiness, Pasha resolves to practise hoop-la all winter so as to be able to bankrupt the owner when the fairground opens again in the spring. This he does, and the girl's father is forced to choose between her and his wealth; he chooses the latter and gives up his daughter to her beloved Pasha.

Nozhi depicts Moscow in the NEP period, and despite Kataev's satirical treatment of the booth owner, it is clear from the tone of the story that the author likes the colourful way of life and the relaxed atmosphere of well-being which NEP

brings. Therefore, although Kataev does not sympathise with the nepman, the story as a whole confirms the ambiguous response to material wealth which had already emerged in such stories as Ruzh'e and Ser Genri i chert.

Although Veshchi (1929) was written after the NEP period had formally ended, it belongs in spirit to that period, and its theme - the obsessive desire for wealth - was a common one during NEP.¹ The central characters are a young couple called Zhorzhik and Shurka who get married on a fine May day. Straight after the wedding they rush to the market to buy 'things' such as blankets of various colours, goloshes, an alarm clock, chairs, a rug with a tiger on it and much else besides. During the next few months Shurka often wakes in the night and thinks of the things she could have bought. Whenever they receive their pay they rush to the market to supplement their stock of goods. Meanwhile, Zhorzhik's health begins to deteriorate. Neighbours warn Shurka to take him to a sanatorium, but she insists that she knows how to look after him. Finally, he dies, and she is genuinely grief-stricken. But within a few months she has married another young man and once more begun collecting things from the market.

The major satirical device in this story is the replacement of the normal passion of a young wife for her husband by Shurka's passion for things. After the wedding, Zhorzhik, wishing to be alone with his wife, asks her:

1. It is possible that Veshchi may have been inspired in part by Mayakovskii's Klop, the first act of which bears certain resemblances to Kataev's story.

- Теперь куда же? - спросил долговязый, узкогрудый и смиренный Жоржик, искоса взглянув на Шурку.

Она прижалась к нему, большая, красивая, горячая, как печь, шепотнула его ухо веточкой черемухи, вставленной в жидкие волосы, и, страстно раздув нос, шепнула:

- На Сухаревку. Вещи покупать. Куда ж? (1,362)

Or again, a little later:

Среди ночи Шурка проснулась и, мучимая тайными желаниями, разбудила мужа.

- Слышишь, Жоржик...Ну, Жоржик-жа!.. - зашептала она, жарко дыша ему в ключицу. - Проснись! Зря, знаешь, канареечное одеяло не взяли. Канареечное куда интереснее было. Определенный фант. Канареечное надо было брать. И калоши тоже не на той подкладке взяли. Не угадали...На серой подкладке надо было брать. Куда интереснее как на красной. И кровать с шарами бы...Не рассчитали... (1,364)

Kataev adds depth to his story by making Shurka, in whom sexual passion has given way to a passion for things, a sympathetic character. She is not indifferent to her husband's worsening health, despite her words to the neighbour:

- Ровно ничего с ним не произойдет! - нарочито грубо крикнула Шурка, тыкая в стороны булкообразными локтями. - Я ему тут устрою лучше всякой санатории. Нажарю заклет - пускай жрет, сколько хочет!

Но в душе у нее опять похолодело. (1,365 My italics - RR)

The story of Zhorzhik and Shurka is a satirical comedy, but, unlike most of Kataev's satirical sketches and stories, it has its tragic side.¹ Unusually for him, Kataev here goes past the situation to the implication of that situation for the characters. Only in Zolotoe pero and Rastratchiki among the satirical works does he do likewise.

1. Kataev recalls that Gor'kii commented on the tragedy in the story. See L. Skorino, Pisatel' i ego vremya, p. 187.

3.6 Rastratchiki

3.6.1 Introduction

The subject of Rastratchiki, Kataev's most important satirical work, is the embezzlement of a large sum by two petty officials - an accountant and his cashier. Following a spate of thefts from offices, it is expected that Filipp Stepanovich Prokhorov, the accountant, and Vanechka, the cashier, will abscond with their firm's money.¹ Quite by accident (and partly through the suggestions of a fellow worker) they get drunk and find themselves on a train to Leningrad with a huge sum of money. There follows a round of drunken encounters with various swindlers, intent on parting the embezzlers from their money. From Leningrad they travel to a provincial town and a village, and then on to the south of the country, and everywhere they go there is vodka to sustain the dream. Finally, with all the money thrown away, they awaken to what they have done and return to face retribution.

Kataev first tackled the theme of embezzlement in a brief sketch entitled Mrachnyi sluchai (2,123-6), written a few months before Rastratchiki. As in the later work, the sketch deals with a situation in which it is more normal to embezzle than not to embezzle. When his is the only firm in

1. A former colleague of Kataev's recalls that there was a cashier in the Gudok office whom everyone called simply Vanechka. In his case, apparently, life imitated art, for after the publication of Rastratchiki he did, indeed, embezzle some of the newspaper's money. See I. Kremlev, V literaturnom stroyu, pp. 199-200.

the street not to have been robbed by members of staff, a director decides to change all the cash into copper coins to make theft a physical impossibility. But the accountant and cashier cannot be thwarted so easily. They spend all night carrying the sacks away, and by morning have taken the entire supply of ready cash. The accountant goes to the casino and the cashier to the railway station. Mrachnyi sluchai resembles Rastratchiki sufficiently to be seen as a direct predecessor of the longer work.

Embezzlement was a popular crime in the mid 1920s. There appears to have been an epidemic of thefts by personnel, and Kataev's work proved topical. The inspiration for Rastratchiki came when Kataev was sent to Tver', where there had been several cases of embezzlement. He was struck, above all, by the way in which the NEP period had re-awakened the old instincts for enrichment, leaving the Revolution, Civil War and period of War Communism as a temporary episode:

'Рабочий городок - и вдруг здесь - растратчики. После "мир хижинам и война дворцам" вновь люди, обезумевшие от жажды что-нибудь себе урвать по старинке.'¹

The magnificent opening passage of Rastratchiki establishes this basic theme. The Russia of the NEP period may aspire to being a new society, but, in fact, it has not changed since the days of Gogol'.

Собственно говоря, уже довольно давно в природе никакой Мясницкой улицы не существует. Имеется улица Первого мая. Но у кого же повернется язык в середине ноября, в тот утренний тусклый час, когда мелкий московский дождь нудно и деятельно поливает

1. Kataev quoted in L. Skorino, Pisatel' i ego vremya, p. 187.

прохожих, когда невероятно длинные прутья неизвестного назначения, гремящие на ломовике, норовят на повороте въехать вам в самую морду своими острыми концами, когда ваш путь вдруг преграждает вывалившийся из технической конторы поперек тротуара фрезерный станок или динамо, когда кованая оглобля битюга бьет вас в плечо и крутая волна грязи из-под автомобильного колеса окатывает и без того забрызганные полы пальто, когда стеклянные доски трестов оглушают зловещим золотом букв, когда мельничные жернова, соломорезки, пилы и шестерни готовы каждую минуту тронуться с места и, проломив сумрачное стекло витрины, выброситься на вас и превратить в кашу, когда на каждом углу воняет из лопнувшей трубы светильным газом, когда зеленые лампы целый день горят над столами конторщиков, - у кого же тогда повернется язык назвать эту улицу каким-нибудь другим именем?

Нет, Мясницкой эта улица была, Мясницкой и останется. Видно, ей на роду написано быть Мясницкой, и другое, хотя бы и самое замечательно лучезарное, название к ней вряд ли пристанет. (3,7-8)

A change of name has not altered the fundamental character of this street; it may bear the trappings of modern technology, but it remains the same old, drab Myasnitskaya, and in this sense it symbolises Moscow and the whole of Russia in the NEP period. It is, therefore, entirely appropriate that Kataev should have found a model for the syntax and intonation of this passage in the work of Gogol', for of all Russian writers Gogol' best captured the drabness and pettiness of man's existence. Kataev paints a Gogolian picture in Rastratchiki, and in doing so, his love of parody and stylisation leads him to employ a Gogolian style; he refers time and time again to the great nineteenth century writer's work, particularly Nevskii prospekt, Mertvye dushi and Shinel'.¹

1. The influence of Gogol' can be discerned at various times in the course of Kataev's career. A few months before writing Rastratchiki he had used Gogolian syntax in Rodion Zhukov. In 1937 the style of Gogol' was imitated in Ya, syn trudovogo naroda.

3.6.2 The Influence of Gogol'

The work of Gogol' is particularly rich in comic detail, often apparently irrelevant, which accounts for its characteristic whimsicality. Kataev, too, surrounds his central characters with a wealth of comic detail in the Gogolian tradition. Like Akakii Akakievich, the hero of Shinel' (on whom he is modelled), Kataev's mild cashier, Vanechka, delights in his completely undemanding work; he reads the sign on his window from the inside, so that it spells ASSAK instead of KASSA; he even gives names to objects, such as his pencil:

Ванечка нежно и заботливо любил свое небольшое кассовое хозяйство. Он любил свой большой, красивый, всегда хорошо очиненный карандаш - наполовину красный, наполовину синий - и даже про себя называл его уважительно Александром Сидоровичем: Александр - красная половинка, Сидорович - синяя. (3,14)

In the town of Kalinov Filipp Stepanovich and Vanechka buy from a peasant a cow with markings on its side like a map of Australia. The peasant is so amazed by the speed of the transaction that, like one of his counterparts in Mertvye dushi, he stands in the street for a long time, staring after the visitors from the capital. Or again, the main square in Kalinov is called Former Dedushkin Square ('ploshchad' byvsh. Dedushkina'). This strange name arose because, having named the square after the police chief, the inhabitants of Kalinov found him to be a thief. But after paying for the street nameplate they were reluctant to buy another, and solved the problem by adding the word 'former' before Dedushkin's name.

One comic detail is taken straight from Mertvye dushi, and Kataev acknowledges its source. While they are in Kalinov,

Filipp Stepanovich and Vanechka make enquiries about the village of Berezovka, and the old man whom they ask gets confused about Berezovka and Upper Berezovka, just as, in Mertvye dushi, there is confusion about Manilovka and Zamanilovka:

Когда же старику разъяснили, что ехать надо не в Березовку, а в Верхнюю Березовку, старик с неудовольствием поворотился ко всем боком, да так-таки прямо и закатил почти что из Гоголя: - Я думал, просто в Березовку, а надо в Верхнюю Березовку. Так бы и сказали. Верхняя Березовка одно, а просто Березовка другое. (3,97)

The principal function of such Gogolian details is undoubtedly comic. The imitation of Gogol's use of detail gives the book its whimsical atmosphere.

If Mertvye dushi is recalled in the provincial scenes of Rastratchiki, then Nevskii prospekt provides the model for the Leningrad scenes, which present a mysterious, unreal city like Gogol's Petersburg:

Ленинград был начисто поглощен густейшим, удушливым и вместе с тем холодным туманом. Будто никакого города на самом деле никогда не существовало. Будто он померещился с пьяных глаз со всеми своими дьявольскими приманками и красотами и навеки исчез. Отдаленно отраженные фонари набухали слабой радугой тумана и гнили. Потерявшие очертания пешеходы неопределенно намекали о своем существовании скрипом и плеском. Все было туманно и неопределенно за спиной извозчика... (3,86)

The hero of Nevskii prospekt - the romantic dreamer and artist Piskarev - is destroyed by his inability to accept the gulf between his ideals and reality. In part, Rastratchiki parodies this situation. Instead of the idealistic artist who is Gogol's hero, Kataev has an accountant whose romantic dreams about a fictitious Count Gvido are an aspect of his social

snobbery. For a while he becomes, in his imagination, the Count Gvido of whom he has long dreamed: 'Прошу вас, господа! Суаре интим. Шерри-бренди...Месье и мадам...Угощаю всех... Чем бог послал...' (3,59) Whereas Piskarev's error is due to his fine, idealistic nature, Prokhorov's is due to stupidity, vanity and drunkenness, and the result is comic rather than tragic. Prokhorov is a poshlyak, and is deceived by Leningrad not because 'the devil has lit the lamps', but because of his own gullibility heightened by a constant alcoholic stupor.

The many references to Gogol' in Rastratchiki, both stylistic and thematic, are of the greatest importance for the work, firstly because the Gogolian style is responsible for much of the comic effect, and secondly because the style serves as a constant reminder that, despite the satire aimed at features of contemporary Russian life, Kataev's basic intention is to show the features of an older Russia, known to Gogol', forcing their way through the surface veneer of Soviet reality.

3.6.3 Satire in Rastratchiki: Targets and Devices

The role of Rastratchiki in the development of the Soviet satirical novel is now well established.¹ But it was not always accepted as a satirical work; Ermilov denied that there was any satire in it, and a critic of a very different type - Shklovskii - emphasised its adventure plot

1. See, for instance, A Vulis, Sovetskii satiricheskii roman, p. 185 and L. Ershov, Sovetskaya satiricheskaya proza (M.,-L., 1966), p. 66.

rather than the satirical elements.¹ However, the genres of satirical novels and picaresque adventure novel may well be combined within the one work, as in the case of Il'f and Petrov's Dvenadtsat' stul'ev (a novel which owes much to Kataev).² The picaresque form allows an author to subject a wide section of society to his satirical observation.

Satire in Rastratchiki is aimed at two main targets: firstly, at the survival into the Soviet era of customs and attitudes which should now belong to the past (and their adaptation to meet Soviet conditions); and secondly, at various aspects of Soviet society of the NEP period ranging from bureaucracy to alcoholism. It must be emphasised, however, that the contention that Rastratchiki is a satirical novel is not intended to imply a strong degree of moral condemnation by Kataev of the people and customs that he satirises.

The most obvious example of the adaptation of old customs to Soviet reality comes in the chapters in which

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1. V. Ermilov, 'Traditsiya i novatorstvo', Krasnaya nov', 1940, No. 2, p. 192. V. Shklovskii, 'Yugo-zapad', Literaturnaya gazeta, 6 January 1933. Shklovskii's important article about the so-called 'Southern school' of writers sparked off a fierce controversy. See, for example, G. Korabel'nikov, 'Lunu delayut v Gamburge', Literaturnaya gazeta, 17 February 1933.
 2. Kataev's role in the composition of Dvenadtsat' stul'ev is well known. He suggested the idea of the novel to Il'f and Petrov and jokingly asked them to write it and submit it to him for inspection. When he returned from holiday a draft of the novel had been written. See E. Petrov, 'Iz vospominanii ob Il'fe' in I. Il'f, Zapisnye knizhki 1925-37 (M., 1957), p. 19. The style of Rastratchiki influenced Il'f and Petrov, and one chapter of Dvenadtsat' stul'ev, omitted from the final version of the novel, was apparently a friendly parody on Kataev's work. See A. Vulis, Sovetskii satiricheskii roman, p. 183.

Filipp Stepanovich and Vanechka allow themselves to be cheated by a number of former princes and princesses who have gathered together for a film and remain together in order to squeeze money out of tourists. These aristocratic parasites survive because of their adaptation to a different way of life and, more importantly, because of the snobbery and ingrained social attitudes of people like Filipp Stepanovich. At his first appearance Filipp Stepanovich is presented as a man harbouring social ambitions: 'в высшей степени приличный немолодой гражданин в калошах, в драповом пальто с каракулевым воротником и каракулевой же шляпе пирожном, с каракулевой лентой и полями уточкой.' (3,7) As with Gogol', the author's protestation that his character is extremely respectable somehow suggests that, at bottom, he is not; moreover, the abundance of astrakhan suggests that Filipp Stepanovich considers himself to be a person of some importance, like the bourgeois lady in astrakhan in Blok's Dvenadtsat'.

His view of his own importance is soon confirmed. Sometimes, when he was at work: 'ему представлялось, что он не кто иной, как опытный генерал, мужественно и тонко руководящий с возвышенности некими военными операциями чрезвычайной сложности.' (3,11-12) In his imagination his own modest exploits during the Russo-Japanese War become exaggerated, as in the wording of an advertisement which he places in the Moscow Marriage Gazette, where he describes himself as: 'Воин, герой Порт-Артура и кавалер орденов... Сын Марса.' (3,12)

In a comic detail which is truly Gogolian in its absurdity, Kataev suggests that Filipp Stepanovich's feeling

of superiority over others may have arisen from a line in a novel which he once read:

Очень возможно, что она родилась давным-давно, именно в ту минуту, когда Филипп Степанович, лежа на животе среди гаоляна в пикете под Чемульпо, прочел в походном великосветском романе следующую знаменательную строчку: "Граф Гвидо вскочил на коня..." (3,13)

He soon forgets the novel, but that single phrase becomes imprinted on his memory and he sometimes imagines himself to be Count Gvido. The pettiness and absurdity of his aspiration is emphasised by the papier-mache horse (mentioned several times), which acts as a commentary on Filipp Stepanovich's dreams of greatness. His only steed is made of papier-mache.

Filipp Stepanovich has one other hero - his former employer, old Sabbakin, the head of the firm Sabbakin and Son. Whenever he is faced with a novel situation, especially one involving social behaviour, Filipp Stepanovich tries to resolve it as old Sabbakin would have done. For example, when he has to order a meal in a restaurant he remembers how old Sabbakin had done this:

Филипп Степанович припомнил, как старик Саббакин в таких случаях лихо расправлялся у Львова, искоса поглядел на Никиту и Ванечку, выставил ногу в калоше и быстро заказал графинчик очищенной, селедочку с гарниром, порцию поросенка под хреном и пару чая. (3,22)

Having carefully depicted Filipp Stepanovich as a man with almost boundless respect for his social superiors under the old regime, Kataev then introduces him to the aristocrats whom he so much admires. The 'Tsar' who so impresses Filipp Stepanovich is actually a baker from the 'Peterburgskaya

storona' who resembles Nicholas II, but who is so ordinary that even his name is Sereda.

In the presentation of the 'Tsar' and aristocrats Kataev uses a device which he was to return to in Vremya, vpered! - namely, the development of a situation which the reader knows to be absurd or which is incomprehensible followed later by an explanation. The initial scene is viewed through the eyes of the drunken Filipp Stepanovich and Vanechka, whereas the explanation comes from the author himself. Thus, Filipp Stepanovich and Vanechka accept the presence of the Tsar and the aristocracy because this is what they want to see; and because their viewpoint predominates at this stage of the novel, no explanation is offered to the reader for the existence of a Tsar whom everyone knows to be dead. As a result, although the description is perfectly realistic, it is imbued with a feeling of grotesque unreality, the more so since the author allows his own viewpoint to diverge from that of his drunken heroes in one small detail - the emperor is referred to through the passage as 'pokoinyi imperator Nikolai Vt'.

The use of the alcohol-affected viewpoint of the embezzlers introduces into the style of the work an element of fantasy similar to that produced by delirium in Ser Genri i chert and several other stories of the 1920s. The satirical blow is dealt by switching from the alcohol-induced fantasy (a superb example of ostranenie) to the prosaic and sordid reality. As an example, compare the following two passages:

Сию же минуту покачнувшийся Филипп Степанович был подхвачен под руки с одной стороны корнетом, а с другой покойным императором и бережно доставлен в соседнюю залу, где находился буфет. Наверху, на хорах, заиграл струнный оркестр. Престарелый адмирал вытащил из кармана сюртука колоду карт. Великосветские дамы и мужчины гуськом потянулись к буфету, где уже слышались острые поцелуи виновных пробок. (3,59)

Даже царя Николая для этого дела выкопали настолько подходящего, что многие бывшие в обморок попадали, как только увидели, - до того, говорят, похож. И, представь себе, кто же? Один простой, обыкновенный булочник с Петербургской стороны. Пьяница и жулик. По фамилии Середа. У него борода такая, и усы такие же точь-в-точь - словом, вылитый царский полтинник. (3,62)

One further example will serve to illustrate Kataev's method of satirising the former aristocracy and those who still envy and respect them.

Сконфуженно крутя головой и плотно сжимая под мышкой портфель, Ванечка осоловелыми глазами обвел залу и вдруг увидел девушку, которая сидела вся закутанная в персидскую шаль, положив ногу на ногу, курила папироску и смотрела на него слегка прищуренными черкесскими глазами, как бы говоря: "Вы, кажется, хотели, молодой человек, познакомиться с графиней? Так вот, допустим, я графиня. А ну-ка, рискните". (3,59)

Под фонарем Ванечка нетерпеливо, дрожащими руками отсчитал и выдал очень большую сумму. Тогда девушка заплакала, прижалась, горячо поцеловала в щеку, оттолкнула, сказала: "Фу, Иван, какой ты небритый" - и повела спать в каморку, где горел керосиновый ночник и по стенам ползали черные тараканы, а угол был задернут ситцевым пологом, за которым послышался храп. (3,73)

Sidel'nikova has observed that only in a drunken stupour can the old world be raised again.¹ This observation is certainly true, but it does not go quite far enough. Filipp Stepanovich's romantic dreams about Count Gvido and high society obscure the reality of that society as much as does

1. T. Sidel'nikova, Valentin Kataev, p. 63.

his drunkenness; the former age is resurrected because people like the two embezzlers wish it to be; the Revolution has brought no fundamental change in their outlook.

For the first of the targets for Kataev's satire - the existence in the Soviet era of pre-revolutionary social attitudes - the main satirical methods of the contrast between drunken and sober viewpoints and frequent references to Gogol's work are very effective, for they both serve to emphasise the artificiality of the world of the embezzlers' dreams. Kataev's use of an alcoholic haze, like a silk screen through which everything appears different, and his conscious stylistic references to Gogol' make Rastratchiki a highly stylised work.

Yet, although the embezzlers' dreams are shown to be artificial, the real world in which they find themselves is, for most of the novel, one from which it is best to escape into dreams. The encounters with the prostitute Isabella in the grotesquely (and, no doubt, misleadingly) named 'Hygienic Hotel', and with the roguish book salesman illustrate an important aspect of life in NEP period Russia, namely, the opportunism of grasping people - the power of money. The city to which the innocent embezzlers come is as grotesque a place as ever Gogol' created; it is a city inhabited, apparently exclusively, by rogues, prostitutes and confidence tricksters ready to prey on such naive newcomers as Filipp Stepanovich and Vanechka.

The book salesman quickly realises that he is dealing with embezzlers from whom he can extract a great deal of money

by veiled threats of disclosure, and he allows them to think he is a detective:

- У меня есть к вам одно совсем небольшое официальное дельце. Впрочем, не буду вас задерживать.

- Виноват, товарищ, - вдруг проговорил Филипп Степанович высокомерно в нос, - ви-но-ват-с, я, как представитель центрального учреждения...То есть мы, как обследователи условий...будучи в некотором роде ...Собственно, с кем имею честь?

- Сейчас вы это увидите, - с ядовитой учтивостью сказал посетитель альтом и разложил на столе портфель. Визжа винтами протеза, он, не торопясь, его отомкнул, пошарил и вынул бумагу.

- Потрудитесь прочесть, тут указано все. (3,81)

Such is the relief of the embezzlers when they discover that this latter day Porfirii Petrovich is nothing more sinister than a book salesman, that they agree instantly to buy his overpriced wares.

Kataev here satirises an aspect of NEP Russia, but his liking for the scoundrel permeates his entire treatment of the scene. Just as Ostap Bender, Il'f and Petrov's roguish hero, evokes the reader's sympathy because he has that of the authors, so does Kataev's swindler. Like Bender (who may well have been based in part on him) the book salesman has adapted to NEP conditions and uses them to his advantage.

If everyone in Leningrad appears to be looking for an easy way to make money, then everyone in Russia appears to have a desperate craving for vodka as Kataev turns his sardonic gaze on the problem of alcoholism. The embezzlers themselves are drunk most of the time, which, as has been shown, affects the style of the work by allowing Kataev to introduce the elements of fantasy which he so loved. Other characters, too, spend much time drinking. The prostitute Isabella says:

'- А говорят, скоро сорокаградусную выпустят...Даст бог, доживем, тогда вместе выпьем.' (3,43)

Yet, although satirising alcoholism, Kataev once again shows some sympathy towards those who drink heavily, for only vodka can dispel the gloom, boredom and terrible drabness of Russia. The opening passage of the book revealed how drab Moscow is; the provincial town of Kalinov is much worse. Its grey streets and broken-down buildings are completely cheerless and can be enlivened only when the inhabitants are drunk. The cabby who takes Filipp Stepanovich and Vanechka to Kalinov repeats almost exactly Isabella's words about the need for vodka in order to make life bearable: '- Это, гражданин, верно, что народ скучный,...ваша истинная правда. Потому и скучный, что водки дожидается. Даст бог, до завтра доживем - сорокаградусной попробуем.' (3,93) When the embezzlers return to Kalinov from their short visit to the village of Upper Berezovka the vodka is on sale and the town is completely altered:

Город Калинов был неузнаваем. Куда только девалась вся его давешняя скука! Окна трактиров и винных лавок пылали. Возле них стояли толпы... Со всех сторон гремели гармоника и бренькали балалайки. В улицах и переулках компаниями и поодиночке шатались калиновские обыватели, пьяные в дым. Вокруг стоял неразборчивый гул и бормотанье гульбы. (3,109-10)

The result of drinking in Kalinov is that fights break out and the policeman, who alone, it seems, remain sober, are powerless to stop them. Yet the town at least shakes off the stultifying boredom and lethargy which otherwise grip it. Similarly, Filipp Stepanovich and Vanechka resort to vodka

to escape the crushing boredom and futility of their lives. Their embezzlement and the (albeit illusory) freedom which it allows them, correspond to the liberating effect of alcohol. Thus, it is entirely appropriate that their wild orgy of wish fulfilment should be accompanied by constant drinking. One of the most interesting features of Rastratchiki is that drunkenness is both a target for Kataev's satire and one of the principal satirical devices.

3.6.4 The Characters

In discussing the influence of Gogol' and the elements of satire in Rastratchiki, it has been necessary to consider the major characteristics of Filipp Stepanovich Prokhorov and Vanechka, but some further comments must be made.

Despite the interest in high society which both heroes show, their position in life is a humble one. The professions of accountant and cashier have connotations of humdrum routine matched by few others. The heroes may not consciously embezzle the money (they are pressured into it by circumstances) but the act of wild abandon is consistent with their secret wishes and the unrelenting tedium of their work. (Although it must be stressed that Vanya, in particular, is not conscious of any boredom.)

Like Khlestakov in Revizor, the heroes of Rastratchiki remain passive throughout their adventures. The act of embezzlement comes about largely because their colleague Nikita is so afraid that they will abscond with the money

before he receives his wages that he accompanies them to the bank, and then to a restaurant, where they get drunk. The simple Nikita takes on an almost demonic aspect through the drunken eyes of the heroes as he accompanies them to the station and sees them on to the train. His will appears to dominate them in the entire opening episode, which sets the pattern for future encounters. Almost all the characters whom they meet in their travels manipulate the passive and essentially innocent embezzlers.

Throughout their travels Filipp Stepanovich and Vanechka retain the relationship of accountant and cashier. Filipp Stepanovich authorises Vanechka to pay for various services, using the official jargon to which they have become accustomed. For instance, when they arrive in Leningrad, Filipp Stepanovich hands over the railway tickets to Vanechka with the words:

- Ванечка, приобщи эти оправдательные документы к делу, - сказал он с той неспешной и солидной деловитостью, с какой обыкновенно относился на службе к подчиненным.

И в его воображении вся эта поездка вдруг представилась как весьма ответственная служебная командировка, имеющая важное государственное значение. (3,44)

3.6.5 The 'Realistic' Context

For most of its length Rastratchiki remains a comic stylisation of NEP period Russia; its characters are grotesque, but because the world in which they find themselves is equally grotesque there is no sense of jarring incongruity. As Viktor

Shklovskii puts it: '"Растратчики" - это рыба на зеркале. В эту блестящую поверхность нельзя нырнуть.'¹ Shklovskii's enlightening comment refers primarily to the characterisation in Rastratchiki, which is not intended to show great psychological insight. Kataev's concern is with surfaces, not with the depths of feelings and motivation (although, as has been shown, his characters are not entirely superficial). Rastratchiki is a brilliant picture of one side of Russian life as it appears to an amused observer, but, in order to reveal it for what it is, Kataev has to contrast his picture with another, healthier way of life. The distortion of reality in the novel can only be appreciated by a change of focus. If people like Isabella and the book salesman and the two embezzlers are to be the targets of satire, the reader must see them in the context of ordinary, hard-working people. In the chapter in which Vanechka meets his mother the tone becomes serious and pathetic.

Хозяйка пошла алыми пятнами. Ей вдруг сделалось ясно, зачем приехал Ванечка из города, и почему у него деньги, и кто такой Филипп Степанович: все как на ладони. А она-то обрадовалась! Поживет, думала, сыночек дома, на Грушиной свадьбе будет гулять, а то и вовсе останется в деревне, за хозяйство возьмется. Все-таки с мужчиной совсем не то, что без мужчины. А тут такой, оказывается, грех! Так совестно, что в глаза людям бы не глядела. (3,105)

The intention behind such passages may be clear enough, but the fact remains that the pathetic tone jars with the overall atmosphere of the work. The attempt to humanise the Bachmachkin - like Vanechka by giving him a solid home background strikes a discordant note. Similarly, in the final chapter, both embezzlers wake from their dream-like state

1. V. Shklovskii, 'Syuzhet i obraz', Literaturnaya gazeta, 17 August 1932. (The quoted remark is an aside in an article devoted to Vremya, vpered!)

and re-enter the normal realistic world. As they do so, Kataev attempts to portray them as pathetic, but the attempt seems misplaced in view of their earlier portraits.

Филипп Степанович засмеялся сухим, деревянным смехом и сам вдруг испугался этого смеха. Он очнулся, посмотрел вокруг осмысленными глазами и весь осунулся. Его лицо стало сизым. Он слабо потрогал пальцами длинную свою шею. - Яня, - сказал он густым, высоким, нежным и спертым голосом, - Яня, мне худо. (3,126)

Or again:

Пять лет! И он стал думать о том чудесном, замечательном и неизбежном дне через пять лет, когда он выйдет из тюрьмы на свободу. (3,128)

Just as the opening chapter had contained a long street description which set the tone for the whole book, so does the final chapter contain a long description of a Moscow street scene. But this time, the scene is quite different. Instead of the drab November day on which everything appeared depressing, the final street scene takes place on a fine, frosty March day, with a corresponding change in the mood of the city.

Солнце опускалось за синие крыши. Розовое, совершенно чистое небо хорошо и нежно стояло за куполами Страстного монастыря. Иней падал с белых ветвей бульвара. Твердый снег визжал и трещал под подошвами - селитрой. Дворники сбрасывали с крыши пятиэтажного кафельного дома снег. Плотные пласты вылетали на обморочной высоте из-за карниза в голубом дыму и, увеличиваясь, неслись вниз компактными штуками белого материала, разворачиваясь на лету волнистыми столбами батиста, и хлопались, разлетаясь в пыль у подошвы дома. Санные колеи и трамвайные рельсы блистали на поворотах сабельным зеркалом. Через дорогу под барабан важно переходил отряд пионеров. Рабфаковцы в пальтишках на рыбьем меху пересканивали с ноги на ногу или лепили друг другу в спину снежками ...Город дышал молодым дыханием езды и ходьбы. (3,127)

The change of focus by which Kataev allows the reader to see past the artificial, stylised world of the embezzlers to a different reality where honest people work soberly

corresponds on a larger scale to the device which he uses elsewhere in the book of contrasting a distorted view of something with an undistorted view. However, important though the street scene is for contrast, the final pathetic view of the embezzlers beginning their sentences remains an excrescence on the grotesque, emotionless, Gogolian canvas of Rastratchiki.

3.6.6 Concluding Remarks

Rastratchiki is undoubtedly Kataev's most significant work of the 1920s and one of the best works he has ever produced. In it he stands back and observes with evident sardonic satisfaction the contradictions of NEP society. The picture he paints is a very funny, yet very depressing one. But Kataev's interest appears to be that of the amused observer rather than that of the passionately involved participant who would like to change that society. His work is satirical, but it lacks bitterness. In Rastratchiki several features of Kataev's work of the 1920s come together to form a mature and satisfying novel. The sharp sense of humour, the portrayal of unusual states of mind, the love of parody and stylisation, the ambiguous attitude towards those who have adapted to Soviet society - all of these are common aspects of Kataev's work in this decade, and all feature in Rastratchiki. Above all, perhaps, the mixture of realism and fantasy, of sober, accurate descriptions and unusual distortions and associations marks Rastratchiki as the work of the mature Kataev. Not until the 1960s was such a blend to recur in his work in any extended form.

3.7 Drama 1927-33

3.7.1 Rastratchiki

Towards the end of the 1920s there was a strong upsurge of interest in the theatre and, in particular, a desire to see new Soviet plays in production. The Moscow Arts Theatre played a leading role in the development of Soviet drama, and both Stanislavskii and Nemirovich-Danchenko were eager to attract to the theatre those young prose writers like Leonov, Ivanov, Kataev and Olesha whose stories and novels were then being published. At Stanislavskii's suggestion, meetings between actors, directors and potential playwrights were held both in the theatre and in Stanislavskii's flat.¹ The authors who were invited included Vs. Ivanov, Leonov, Kataev, Lidin, Bulgakov and (a little later) Olesha and Afinogenov.² Since the authors mentioned were mainly prose writers it is not surprising that early productions of Soviet works at MKhAT were sometimes dramatisations of stories and novels, as was the case with Ivanov's Bronepoezd 14-69 and with the theatre's most successful Soviet play - Bulgakov's Dni Turbinykh. Kataev, too, was approached by MKhAT and asked to write a play based on Rastratchiki. An acquaintance has described what this honour meant to a young, as yet relatively unknown author:

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1. N. Gorchakov, 'Rabota K.S. Stanislavskogo nad sovetskoi p'esoi' in Voprosy rezhissury (M., 1954), pp. 84-143.
 2. One of Kataev's stories - Avtor (2,197-209) - recounts the feelings of a young writer in such famous company. For a satirical picture of Moscow Arts Theatre personnel at this time see Bulgakov's Teatral'nyi roman. M. Bulgakov, Romany (M., 1973), pp. 273-420.

Писать пьесу для большой сцены Московского Художественного Театра - могла бы быть большая честь для литератора! Катаев с головой ушел в работу, мы, его товарищи по перу, превратились в ярых болельщиков. ¹

Rastratchiki received its premier on 20 April 1928. ²

Much can be learned about the nature of Kataev's satirical talent from the story of the production and the quarrels between Stanislavskii and the author. Speaking twenty years after the production Kataev stated his intentions in writing the play in the following manner:

У меня был свой замысел: гротеск, сатирическая фантастика - оживает прошлое, царь участвует, - все это смешно, уродливо, феерически невероятно... словом выдумка, фантасмагория. ³

Stanislavskii was well aware, in theory at least, that it is impossible for a director to make of a play something completely different from the author's intention. In discussing his mistake over the production of Rastratchiki he said: 'В авторе, в том, какой он, скрыт почти всегда секрет успеха нашей режиссерской работы.' ⁴ However, in practice he frequently departed from this principle and, carried away by his own idea of a play, forced the author to make changes which were ultimately harmful. ⁵ Such was the case with Rastratchiki. Stanislavskii was later to admit that his production was too heavy, laden as it was with the weight of almost Dostoevskian psychology which

1. I. Kremlev, V literaturnom stroyu, p. 200.

2. N. Gorchakov, 'Rabota K.S. Stanislavskogo...', p. 95.

3. Quoted in L. Skorino, Pisatel' i ego vremya, p. 200.

4. N. Gorchakov, 'Rabota K.S. Stanislavskogo...', p. 103.

5. P. Markov asserts that this was a general characteristic of the great director and not merely confined to his handling of Rastratchiki. See P. Markov, 'O Stanislavskom', Pravda teatra (M., 1965), p. 27.

it could not bear. The character of Filipp Stepanovich as played by Tarkhanov was particularly distant from Kataev's original creation. He was much more of a deliberate criminal than the character in the novel and in his behaviour there was none of that passivity which leads the character almost accidentally into crime.¹ Such an interpretation was clearly more than the light structure of the play could take and, as Markov has said: 'легкая ткань пьесы постепенно разрушилась и пьеса потеряла свойственное ей обаяние.'²

Stanislavskii's attempts to raise the play's significance to a cosmic level (the phrase is his) and to see behind the Gogolian trappings a moral concern for man of truly Gogolian depth ran counter to Kataev's intentions, and was undoubtedly the major factor in the failure of the production.³ Kataev's play, like the novel on which it was based, contains much that is reminiscent of Gogol', but the adoption of a Gogolian style did not mean that Kataev was a new Gogol'. The play is satirical but it is full of very good-humoured satire; the author's imitation of Gogol' amounts to gently ironic parody. It was the failure to accept the play for what it was that misled Stanislavskii.

Stanislavskii himself came to see that he had misread Kataev's play and to appreciate the validity of the author's

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1. A description of the production and Tarkhanov's interpretation of the role of Filipp Stepanovich may be found in E. Polyakova, 'Iz opyta MKhATA nad p'esami sovetskikh dramaturgov 1917-41' in Teatr i dramaturg (M., 1959), p. 136.
 2. P. Markov, 'O Stanislavskom', p. 28.
 3. The play ran for only eighteen performances. See F. Mikhail'skii and M. Rogachevskii, Moskovskii Khudozhestvennyi teatr v sovetskuyu epokhu (M., 1974), p. 545.

talent, even although it was not of the sort that he had originally taken it to be:

Я не понял почерк Катаева, его видение людей, событий; частное, но яркое явление я возымел желание возвести в символ. И погорел... Катаев великолепный наблюдатель, острый, тонкий, но это не Гоголь! Он не стремится вздыбить мир! От этого его творчество не менее почетно. Оно несет людям радость, которой не так уж много в жизни, оно не заставляет их пристально вглядываться в теневые стороны их бытия, бороться с ними.¹

In this assessment Stanislavskii has come very close to the true nature of Kataev's satirical work in the second half of the 1920s, the essential features of which include amused observation and great good humour.

3.7.2 Kvadratura kruga

Kataev's most successful play was Kvadratura kruga which he wrote in 1927.² Following productions at the Teatr Satiry and the Moscow Arts Theatre (the latter directed by Gorchakov), the play was staged by many amateur and professional companies throughout the Soviet Union and has since been performed in many countries.³

The play is a light-hearted comedy in which two young couples, forced by the housing shortage to share a room, discover that they have made the wrong choice of partner, and eventually change partners. Three of the young people are Komsomol members, and some of the humour derives from their use

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1. Stanislavskii quoted in N. Gorchakov 'Rabota K.S. Stanislavskogo...', p. 103. My italics.
 2. For Kataev's comments on the writing of Kvadratura kruga see Sovremennyi teatr, 1928, No. 39, p. 614.
 3. For an idea of the play's popularity see Yu.O. (Yurii Olesha), 'Chto na afishe?', 30 dnei, 1928, No. 10, pp. 80-2.

of current Communist jargon, but essentially the play is too good-humoured to be satirical at the expense either of the Komsomol or the acute housing problem. It owes more to the traditional French farce than to its contemporary setting among Komsomol students.¹ According to one reviewer the first production at the Teatr Satiry failed because the director did not understand this. Sobolev writes: 'Спектакль "Сатиры" нисколько не помог Катаеву. Напротив - он оказал ему дурную услугу, подчеркнув в пьесе то, что является в ней притянутым за уши - весь этот якобы комсомольский и вузовский быт.'²

In the Moscow Arts Theatre production Gorchakov, who had learned much from the failure of his colleague Sudakov (under the influence of Stanislavskii) to present Rastratchiki with sufficient light-heartedness, set out to emphasise the purely comic aspect of Kvadratura kruga. In his notes intended to help the actors he stresses that the play is above all a joke and must be played accordingly: 'Никаких "вопросов" пьеса не ставит, никаких "проблем" не разрешает. Надо твердо помнить, что это только веселая шутка - водевиль. Вывод для постановщика: не искать в пьесе разрешения вопросов "семейного быта", "новой морали" и.т.п.'³

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1. See the review signed with the initial V. in Nasha gazeta, 30 September 1928: 'Взяв схему западно-европейской адюльтерной комедии (путаница мужей женами, обмен супругами), "для современности" перенеся действие в комсомольскую среду и придав интриге "советскую" завязку (теснота жилплощади) В. Катаев ловко построил интригу пьесы, наполнив ее обилием смешных положений, повторяющихся в разных вариациях, насытив диалоги действующих лиц фельетонными словечками.'
 2. Yu. Sobolev, 'Kvadratura kruga', Vechernyaya Moskva, 21 September 1928.
 3. N. Gorchakov, 'Rezhisserskie kommentarii k p'ese V. Kataeva Kvadratura kruga', introduction to V. Kataev, Kvadratura kruga (M., -L., 1929), p. 52.

Kvadratura kruga shares several of the features of Kataev's humorous sketches and short stories to the extent that it can be considered an integral rather than a peripheral part of his work of the 1920s. The situation which serves as a plot is anecdotal, recalling the many everyday situations round which Kataev's sketches are constructed. As in the majority of the sketches the amusing incongruity of the situation is exploited largely for its own sake, and the author's innate good humour predominates over any harsher tones suggested by the situation and vitiates any satirical point. Within the greater framework of a three act play Kataev develops character more than he does in a short sketch, but his four young people are still types rather than individuals and the play resembles the sketches in being a comedy of situation rather than of character. The figure of Emil'yan Chernozemnyi, who is a parody of the inferior imitators of Esenin, is drawn entirely from Kataev's sketch Emil'yan Chernozemnyi. (2,167-73)

So closely does Kvadratura kruga resemble the sketches published in Gudok and other newspapers that it can be considered a development in a different genre of these sketches. But some details also echo or anticipate Kataev's longer stories of the 1920s. The extreme shortage of living accommodation which leads to people having to share a room is dealt with in both Bezdel'nik Eduard and Rebenok; Lyudmila, with her concern for material possessions, especially a blanket, anticipates the figure of Shurka in Veshchi (although Lyudmila needs to feed her husband, whereas Shurka starves hers). In

Scene 13 of Act 1 Vanya and Tonya recall their brief love affair of a year ago in terms which bring to mind Kataev's story Zimoi:

Такие-то дела, Тонечка. А то дерево на Патриарших прудах помнишь? Десятое с краю, если считать от грелки?...Я ведь потом всю ночь напролет...Ты знаешь...А на другой день как ошалелый по всей Москве...Снег еще, помню, валил...Всю грудь задепило...И ресницы, знаешь, иголочками такими...Эхмал (7,24)

Just as Filipp Stepanovich and Vanechka in Rastratchiki never cease to use the official language of bureaucrats, even in their personal relationship, so do Tonya and Abram use current Komsomol jargon to define their relationship to each other (an incongruity which results in some humour).

All of these examples serve to illustrate the close links between Kvadratura kruga and Kataev's prose works of the period. But it is also necessary to take a wider view, for in the 1920s Kataev frequently parodied popular works or genres (examples include Ostrov Ereendorf, Povelitel' zheleza and Rastratchiki). Similarly, in Kvadratura kruga Kataev takes the popular theme of the sexual morality of young people, especially Komsomol members, and treats it in his own joking manner. Most important in a whole series of works devoted to the theme of love among members of the Komsomol are Bez cheremukhi and Luna s pravoi storony by P. Romanov and S. Malashkin respectively.¹ Kataev's approach to the 'problem' of sex, marriage, and morality is indicated by an incident in Act 2

1. Other works on this theme include N. Nikitin, Prestuplenie Kirika Rudenko (M., 1934) (written in 1927); N. Nikandrov, Put' k zhenshchine (M., 1927). For a discussion of this theme in literature of the period see V. Buznik, 'Povest' 20-kh godov', in V. Kovalev (ed.), Russkaya sovetskaya povest'..., pp. 204-6.

Scene 3 in which Abram and Tonya use two pages of Luna s pravoï storony to wrap sausage. When Abram looks to see if any sausage is left Tonya says:

Ну что, осталось?

Абрам: Осталось. Две страницы из "Луны с правой стороны". (Показывает листок)
Можем солидно закусить. (Печально усмехается) Ха! (7,30)

Abram constantly asks himself whether his actions are 'ethical'; moreover he does not restrict this question to matters of sexual morality, but applies it to petty acts such as taking a slice of his room-mate's sausage. In this way Kataev constantly makes fun of the ethical dilemmas posed in works like Bez cheremukhi and Luna s pravoï storony. The Party's campaign for solid family relations which was beginning at the time of the play's publication, adds to Abram's ethical dilemma: 'Сегодня записался...Завтра расписался...Послезавтра опять записался. Что подумают ребята из райкома? Что скажет товарищ флавий?' (7,50) But here, as elsewhere, Kataev does not allow the tone to become heavy. Abram's 'problem' may be dealt with seriously in other works of literature, but in Kvadratura kruga it is part of a joke.

The most remarkable feature of the play is its simplicity. Apart from the four central characters only two others play a significant part; namely, the Party secretary Flavii and the 'poet' Emel'yan Chernozemnyi, neither of whom can be considered a success. Flavii acts purely as a raisonneur, and the introduction into the play of Emel'yan adds little. Thus the play revolves almost entirely around the four central characters - Abram, Vasya, Tonya and Lyudmila. Kataev's basic method is one

of repetition and near-repetition. Almost every scene involving two of the characters corresponds to a scene involving the other two, and often the dialogue is repeated with only minor variations. Yet the effect achieved is never one of tedious repetitiveness, for much of the humour derives precisely from the way in which each of the characters confronts the same situation, and, for this, repetition is required.

In the end the four young people admit their mistake and change partners. No one has suffered permanently as a result of his or her mistake. Kataev treats all four characters with equal warmth and gentle irony - Lyudmila, the rather vulgar practical girl; Tonya, the idealistic, impractical Komsomol member; Vasya, the lively, stylish extrovert; and Abram, the quiet, thoughtful Komsomol - all are viewed with equal affection by the author.

Kataev's warm humour and affection for his characters is disarming and incompatible with true satire. In Kvadratura kruga the essential features of Kataev's humorous works of the 1920s can be seen at their clearest, and the play exemplifies the reasons why most of his humorous writing in this decade has the appearance of being satirical, but actually lacks the bite required for effective satire.

3.7.3 Into the 1930s. Million terzanii and Doroga Tsvetov

As will be shown in the next chapter, the 1930s proved to be an important transitional period for Kataev. In the early years of the decade he strove to transform himself from a Fellow Traveller into an active supporter of the regime. This process can be seen by comparing Kvadratura kruga with two plays of the early 1930s - Million terzanii (1931) and Doroga tsvetov (1933).

In the later plays a harsher edge transforms comedy into satire. Allowing for the genre differences, both plays recall Zolotoe pero, for, as in that story, Kataev's satire is aimed at the Russian intelligentsia. But, whereas Academician Shevelev was portrayed realistically and with a certain degree of respect, both Ekipazhev and Zav'yalov (the heroes of the plays) are represented as mere parasites, pretending to be intellectuals.

Ekipazhev, the hero of Million terzanii, is a former land-owner who now has no one to whom he can 'pass on the banner' of the family tradition, since his son has joined the police force and his younger daughter has married a common worker. His hopes rest on the husband of his newly-married elder daughter, a certain Ananasov, a scion of an old Russian liberal intellectual family. The major device upon which the plot hinges is the common one of mistaken identity as Ekipazhev, who has not met either of his sons-in-law, mistakes the drunken boorish aristocrat Ananasov for the worker Parasyuk, and vice versa. In the course of the confrontation between Ekipazhev

and the positive characters (Parasyuk and his family) it becomes clear that 'the representative of Russian culture' knows nothing about art or literature or any of the other subjects which he claims are so important to him. For years he has been under the impression that a portrait of Dostoevskii which hangs on his wall is of Belinskii. The Parasyuks are far more knowledgeable and cultured than he is. As one of his neighbours remarks of him: 'Вызубрили десять слов: интеллигенция, идеалы, принципы, произвол, знамя - и кричите на всю, всю квартиру, как попугай.' (7,74)

Ekipazhev's intellectual dishonesty is matched by his moral dishonesty. He sells the diamond earrings which his wife had left as dowries for her daughters and then loses the money at the race track. He attempts to assert what might almost be termed the droit de seigneur with his lodger Shura (reflecting, no doubt, his pre-revolutionary habits), and, despite his fine words, he is heavily in debt. Kataev's satirical weapon in debunking Ekipazhev is the juxtaposition of the latter's crude and immoral behaviour and his nobly expressed sentiments:

Как ты смеешь грубить отцу! Кто тебя научил?
Экипажевы никогда не грубили своим отцам. Слышишь
ни-ког-да! Экипажевы высоко держали знамя русской
интеллигенции и свято передали его из рук в руки,
из поколения в поколение. Твой прадед высоко держал
знамя. Твой дед высоко держал знамя. Твой отец
высоко держал знамя. И до сих пор еще держит
довольно высоко, несмотря ни на что. Ну да. Святое
знамя свободы и борьбы. (7,70)

The play is a vehicle for the satirical exposure of Ekipazhev, and in the main it succeeds in unmasking him, despite one or two excesses which threaten the characterisation (for instance the incident in which Ekipazhev spits into a neighbour's

soup pot or the entire episode of the lavatory key). Where the play is weak is in the portrayal of the positive characters, especially the model working family - the Parasyuks. In one production of the play the scene in which Ekipazhev meets the Parasyuks was omitted.¹ The reviewers of the play were eager to stress the need for positive characters in a Soviet play but they criticised Kataev's attempts. One of them wrote:

Новый быт, который пытается набросать Катаев, рисуется им значительно бледнее, с изрядной долей схематичности. При всей теплоте, с которой выведены автором фигуры семьи Парасюков ему не удается избавиться от некоторой слащавости.²

The reviewers were correct to draw attention to the weakness of the play's positive characters in comparison to Ekipazhev. (None of them pointed out, however, that there is nothing more difficult than the portrayal of positive characters in a satirical comedy.) The problem for the dramatist was that if he ignored positive characters he was accused of a one-sided picture of Soviet reality, whereas if he portrayed positive characters they were inevitably pale alongside his central negative character.

Kataev made one more major attempt in 1933 to overcome the problem in his play Doroga tsvetov, the central character of which is a writer and broadcaster called Zav'yalov. Unlike Ekipazhev, who hated everything new, Zav'yalov makes a pretence of being a new man, unfettered by such relics of the past as marital fidelity. His pamphlets and radio talks are about the

1. V. Ermans, 'Million terzanii', Sovetskoe iskusstvo, 15 December 1932.

2. A. Dorokhov, 'Dva milliona terzanii', Vechernyaya Krasnaya gazeta, 4 June 1933.

society of the future which will be free of 'the grave of love', as he calls marriage. His speech is peppered with phrases like 'Nietzsche's superman' which he does not understand but which he has heard and jotted down. In the course of the play he puts into practice his stated views on marriage by deserting his wife and moving from one woman to another. (One of the comic devices is that a messenger trying to give him a parcel is unable to keep up with his changes of address.) At the end of the play when, as is inevitable, he is left alone, he shows that his view of the freedom of love applies to himself only, for he tries to assert his rights over the wife whom he had earlier deserted, thus denying her the freedom he had sought for himself. The play is an interesting attack on the idea of the free man which was prevalent in the 1920s, leading to an increase in the incidence of broken marriages and free love, but which was officially condemned in the more conservative atmosphere of the 1930s, when the social and political value of stable marriage was fully appreciated.

Doroga tsvetov was written at a time when Kataev was moving towards a much greater degree of ideological commitment (evident in Vremya, vpered!). In the report on his work which he presented to the Seventeenth Party Congress he wrote:

Эпоха широкого социалистического наступления, предпринятого партией на всех фронтах, открыла для меня широчайшие горизонты - указала мне мое писательское место, мою конкретную задачу.¹

And again:

Устанавливаются между людьми новые отношения, задачи писателя грандиозно вырастают. Перед

1. V. Kataev, 'Raport semnadtsatomu' in P. Yudin (ed.), Pisateli XVII parts'ezdu (M., 1934), pp. 104-7. (Quoted extract pp. 104-5.)

писателем во весь рост встает целый ряд тем, требующих самого широкого охвата - любовь, семья, творчество, собственность, счастье, горе, радость, молодость, старость, рождение, смерть. Все это надо по-новому осветить, по-новому истолковать и утвердить.¹

Doroga tsvetov is an attempt to deal with an old theme - that of hypocrisy - in the new way demanded by the author in his near contemporary article, by juxtaposing the hypocrite Zav'yalov, the self-proclaimed new man, and the really new people who look on property as communal, and who regard the bonds that bind people not in a possessive light but as the result of deep mutual love and respect. While Zav'yalov merely talks about the future, Tanya's mother, Zhenya, and Tanya herself, are actively building it. Tanya's mother tries to explain this to Zav'yalov:

Мать: Я говорю о том, что мы не только мечтаем о будущем, но делаем будущее. Своими собственными руками. Все по-своему делаем его. И я делаю, и Танька делает, и Женька делает, и вы должны делать -

Завьялов: Позвольте! А я разве не делаю! Как вы странно рассуждаете! Мое дело, это мое слово.

Мать: Верно. Ты и должен своим талантливым словом содействовать, объяснять, мобилизовать массы на достижение этого прекрасного будущего. Показать связь настоящего с будущим. Конкретно, реально!

Завьялов: Да, но моя задача - вообще...

Мать: То-то и беда, что вообще! (7,165)

Kataev's increasingly evident stance of ideological commitment has dispelled the good humour which was an ingredient of his satire in the 1920s. The hypocritical Zav'yalov is attacked more viciously than any preceding character. But that stance of ideological commitment, together, no doubt, with

1. 'Raport semnadtsatomu', p. 107.

the external pressure by literary critics and reviewers with which it was connected, leads Kataev to introduce positive characters who destroy the effectiveness of the play. A scene such as that quoted above is too obviously manufactured by the author; the positive characters remain unconvincing. Even so, Kataev was criticized by one reviewer for presenting too negative a view of Soviet life: 'Но если судить по Дороге цветов, то наша многообразная действительность оказывается вне поля зрения Катаева. Для него она в этой пьесе только фон и источник отыскания в ней еще неистлевших частиц старого.'¹

The tone of this review is an indication of the official attitude towards satire in the 1930s. It was becoming increasingly difficult to write effective satire. (Although it must be pointed out that some fine works were written by writers like Il'f and Petrov.) After Doroga tsvetov Kataev ceased to write satire as such, confining himself to individual portraits in non-satirical works such as that of Madame Storozhenko in Beleet parus odinokii.

3.8 Critical Responses to Kataev's Work of the 1920s

The earliest reviews of Kataev's work date from 1925 and consist of brief comments on the parody novels Ostrov Erendorf and Povelitel' zheleza as well as the collection of stories entitled Bezdel'nik Eduard. The most interesting remarks are those of V. Krasil'nikov about Bezdel'nik Eduard. The reviewer notes Kataev's relatively skilful handling of plot and remarks

1. V. Golubov, 'Kuda vedet doroga tsvetov?', Sovetskoe iskusstvo, 17 May 1934.

on the division of his works into many very short chapters, a feature which he links with the techniques of the cinema.¹ The one-sided, stylised characters are also reminiscent of the types established by the cinema. In general the reviewer is more impressed by Kataev's technical skill than by the content of his works; the heroes of the Civil War stories are seen by him as anti-Soviet (but fortunately impotent) members of the intelligentsia. There is no suggestion in the review, however, that such characters ought not to form part of Soviet literature. On the contrary, Krasil'nikov appears to welcome (albeit in guarded terms) a new author.

On its appearance in 1927 the collection entitled Rastratchiki was greeted with considerable interest and several reviews were devoted to it.² Almost all of the reviewers praised the title story, but criticised the other stories in the collection as weak and uninteresting experiments. Some reviewers of Rastratchiki correctly identified the mixture of fantastic and realistic styles as the key to the novel's success. One reviewer, for example, wrote:

В этой повести есть какая-то острая "сумасшедшинка". Реалистическое описание незаметно переходит в гротесковое и живые лица подменяются масками. Переключением повести из плоскости реальной в плоскость ирреальную достигается особенная острота рассказа.³

This view was echoed by other reviewers, including A. Lezhnev

1. Krasil'nikov's untitled review appeared in Pechat' i revolyutsiya, 1925, No. 5-6, pp. 521-2.
2. See, for example, the following reviews:
 N. Smirnov, Novyi mir, 1927, No. 9, pp. 218-9.
 M. Maizel', Zvezda, 1927, No. 6, pp. 156-7.
 A. Lezhnev, Pechat' i revolyutsiya, 1927, No. 4, pp. 193-4.
 V. Ermilov, Pravda, 29 April 1927.
 A. Shafir, Krasnaya nov', 1927, No. 6, pp. 262-3.
3. M. Maizel', 'Rastratchiki', p. 156.

in Pechat' i revolyutsiya: 'Эта история имеет - при всей обыденности своего сюжета и несомненной реальности быта - нечто фантастическое.'¹ The Novyi mir reviewer, N. Smirnov, wrote: 'В этой повести Катаев очень удачно синтезировал гротескность и реализм.'²

These reviewers accept the notion that the Russia portrayed by Kataev is not a photographic reproduction of the real Russia, but a land where, for satirical and artistic purposes, certain negative features have been exaggerated. On this point Lezhnev says: 'Перед героями Катаева разворачивается какая-то призрачная Россия, опустошенная, неживая...'³ He goes on to distinguish between Kataev's point of view and that of his heroes, emphasising that reality in the book is apprehended through the eyes of the embezzlers, and this is why it appears so distorted.

For the critics of a slightly later period - the early 1930s - such a distinction between the points of view of an author and his characters was no longer possible, and Kataev came under attack for a one-sided representation of Russia in Rastratchiki. V. Rossolovskaya, for example, writes: 'В "Растратчиках" Валентин Катаев повторяет все мировоззренческие и политические ошибки, которые свойственны его сатире в целом.'⁴ I. Mashbits-Verov's criticism of Rastratchiki (and of the rest of Kataev's work of the 1920s) will be considered in due course.

The collection of stories entitled Otets, which appeared the following year, was also praised, notably by A. Derman who

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1. A. Lezhnev, 'Rastratchiki', p. 193.
 2. N. Smirnov, 'Rastratchiki', p. 219.
 3. A. Lezhnev, 'Rastratchiki', p. 193.
 4. V. Rossolovskaya, 'Tvorchestvo Valentina Kataeva', Molodaya gvardiya, 1933, No. 6, p. 126.

was particularly impressed by Kataev's portrait of the old man in the title story.¹ Significantly, though, Derman closes his very positive review with a warning that: 'Манера и стиль писателя - выразительны и остры, но своеобразие и сложность их делает рассказы Катаева доступны пониманию лишь подготовленного читателя.' Derman's reservations were understandable, considering the nature of the journal in which his review appeared, but similar criticisms were to be levelled at Kataev in 1930 which were far more serious for the author and undoubtedly affected considerably his development as a writer.

In September and November 1930 a two-part article criticising Kataev in the most severe terms appeared in the RAPP journal Na literaturnom postu.² Its author, I. Mashbits-Verov, reviewed the entire corpus of Kataev's work of the 1920s and, while admitting that it had some merit (notably the sharp observation, the wit and the sophistication of style), he found that generally speaking Kataev had been a negative influence in Soviet literature. The essential point of his argument is contained in a brief paragraph near the beginning of the article: 'Он не воспитывает из читателей борцов, но зато (пусть неосознанно) воспитывает "существователей", так сказать, бездумных, "наслажденцев" жизни.'³

An analysis of the underlying philosophy of Ryzhie krestiki, Zheleznoe kol'tso and, especially, Otets, leads the critic to the conclusion that Kataev fails to condemn his characters (notably Petr Sinaiskii) because their behaviour

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1. A. Derman, 'Otets', Kniga i profsoyuzy, 1929, No. 1, p. 41.
 2. I. Mashbits-Verov, 'Na grani', Na literaturnom postu, 1930, No. 9, pp. 35-46; and No. 11, pp. 47-56.
 3. 'Na grani', Part 1, p. 35.

is the result of some general law of life and it can no more be condemned than can the fact that a man eats, drinks or breathes. Kataev's error, according to Mashbits-Verov, is that in his philosophy all of life is beautiful. Speaking of the line about the nature of life and happiness which recurs in several stories of the 1920s he says: 'Таков первый, организующий повесть, [Отец] лирический мотив, утверждающий жизнь, как она "есть", со всей ее грязью, которая тоже в конечном счете "прекрасна".'¹

Mashbits-Verov continues by asserting that Kataev's philosophy is basically hedonistic, his aspiration is to enjoy life to the full. Judging from his stories, the basic requirements for a full enjoyment of life are, firstly, love, and secondly, art. In Zimoi, Nozhi, Chelovek s uzlom and above all Ogon', life is portrayed as meaningless and empty without a woman's love. Erokhin's dream at the end of Ogon' serves as a particularly good (because subtle) example of this, in that while it appears to demonstrate that the priest is wrong, it actually reveals that Erokhin would like there to be a God, angels, and a heaven where his Katya could now be alive. Thus even a Communist finds life worthless and senseless when deprived of a woman's love. Having thus identified an important theme in Kataev's work and demonstrated his fine understanding of Ogon', Mashbits-Verov turns more directly to condemnation of Kataev, asserting that for the latter love is simply a toy, a home comfort, an aspect of byt. Similarly, Kataev's implicit view, especially noticable in Zheleznoe kol'tso and Bezdel'nik

1. 'Na grani', Part 1, p. 37.

Eduard, that art is the highest manifestation of man's existence, is no more than decadent meshchanstvo.¹

In part two of his article Mashbits-Verov examines in detail Kataev's portrayal of revolutionaries, his humour and his style. Speaking of Rodion Zhukov he asserts: 'Подлинный смысл рассказа в том, что не может революционизирующийся крестьянин-матрос оставить "непосредственную", "родную", хотя "трудную и горькую", но все же "незаменимую и прекрасную", обыкновенную человеческую жизнь".² Thus, according to the critic, Kataev imposes his own ideas on a revolutionary and distorts his personality. At this point Mashbits-Verov introduces the idea with which his article is to be concluded and which forms the main plank in his attack on Kataev; the author is making no effort to overcome his class prejudices, and is indeed advocating them to others. As a result his work is narrow and dangerous.

As far as Kataev's humour is concerned, his great gifts as a humourist are vitiated by his superficial philosophy, evident above all in Rastratchiki, where a serious social problem is turned into a joke because the problem itself lies outside Kataev's artistic interests. Thus, the example of his humour is but one more piece of evidence demonstrating Kataev's superficiality, the purely anecdotal nature of his talent.

Kataev's style, his choice of imagery, once again illustrates his true position in Soviet literature. Almost all of his images are either from the world of everyday domesticity

1. 'Na grani', Part 1, p. 46.

2. 'Na grani', Part 2, p. 48.

or are purely literary and designed solely for aesthetic effect. The predominance of short stories in his work is another indication of his superficiality.

At this point Mashbits-Verov's analysis of Kataev's work ends, but in a very important conclusion he poses some threatening questions about Kataev's future: 'Основной вопрос таков: как следует относиться к творчеству Катаева? Кто он - враг или художник, которого можно "переделать", изменить, "перетянуть" на сторону революции?'¹ He suggests that Kataev is not yet an enemy of the Soviet regime like Zamyatin and Bulgakov but he is on an edge and a very dangerous edge at that.

The substance of Mashbits-Verov's article has been given in some detail because of its importance for Kataev's subsequent development. In his analysis of Kataev's work Mashbits-Verov reveals himself to be a perceptive and intelligent reader, for there is much truth in his view of Kataev's work of the 1920s. However, the significance of his article lies not in the analysis of Kataev's work, but in the use made of that analysis and in the grim threat with which the article ends. The attack on Kataev is a particularly severe example of the kind of criticism of fellow-travelling authors being made by the RAPP and LEF critics at the end of the 1920s.² Two years earlier Olesha's work had been the subject of a highly critical article in Novyi Lef by Osip Brik³ and even Mayakovskii (who could not be called a Fellow Traveller) came under severe attack by the RAPP critics.⁴

1. 'Na grani', Part 2, p. 55.

2. For an interesting view of the RAPP criticism of Fellow Travellers see V. Pertsov, Mayakovskii: zhizn' i tvorchestvo, 3 vols. (M., 1976), vol. 3, pp. 363-4.

3. O. Brik, 'Simulyatsiya nevmenyaemosti', Novyi Lef, 1928, No. 7, pp. 1-3.

4. See V. Pertsov, Mayakovskii..., vol. 3, pp. 337-8.

As Mashbits-Verov suggests at the end of his article, one of the most pressing problems facing Soviet literature at that time was the future path of the Fellow Travellers. The Party decree of 1925 'O politike partii v oblasti khudozhestvennoi literatury' had determined that the official attitude towards them would be lenient, but towards the end of the decade the outbursts of certain critics, mainly connected with the RAPP group, against Fellow Travellers became increasingly strident and hostile. One of the key terms used by such critics was re-forging (perekovka) or, alternatively, re-education (peredelka or perestroika) to describe the process by which Fellow Travellers were expected to change their outlook and manner of writing by becoming politically committed to active support of the Soviet regime. In conjunction with the increasing pressure on authors to depict the nascent mass industrialisation of the country (sotszakaz) the call for a new ideological approach to literature led to much deep anxiety among Soviet authors, especially those who, as Fellow Travellers, had enjoyed relative freedom of subject matter and approach for much of the 1920s.¹

The attacks of the RAPP critics and their constant exhortations to Fellow Travellers to alter their whole outlook were taken seriously, for although RAPP was not an official Party organisation (and was to be dissolved by the Party within a few years), its Party connections gave it considerable authority. Many authors have subsequently revealed that the

1. For an excellent discussion of this point see A. Gladkov, 'Slova, slova, slova...', Rossiia, Studi e ricerche a cura di Vittorio Strada (Turin), 1974, No. 1, pp. 189-92.

period when RAPP critics were calling for peredelka was one of great tension.¹ Consequently, there can be little doubt that the change in Kataev's work after Mashbits-Verov's article was in large measure a reaction to external pressures. It would, however, be an oversimplification to impute Kataev's change of direction solely to the effect of hostile criticism. The case of Olesha serves as an example of an author's genuine wish to respond to the literary climate of the era, and there are many other cases in Soviet literature of writers altering their method and outlook due to a conviction that in this way they were contributing no less than others to the development of Soviet society. In the case of Kataev by far the more important factor seems to be external pressure, but a certain internal development away from detachment and towards a more active support for the regime (which must not be exaggerated as Soviet critics have tended to do) cannot be entirely denied.

1. See, for example, Vera Inber's diary entry for an unspecified date in April, 1933. V. Inber, Sobranie sochinenii (M., 1965-6), vol. 4 (1966), p. 426.

Что же я почувствовала за этот год нового?

Исчезло чувство падчерицы в литературе, которое было у меня раньше. Я такая же дочь нашей литературы, как и бывшие рапповцы. Я не падчерица и не приемное дитя. Я не подкидыш...

CHAPTER FOUR

The First Half of the 1930s:

Sotszakaz

4.1 Sotszakaz

In October 1928 the first Five Year Plan of national development went into effect and five months later the Sixteenth Party Conference took the decision to implement it in four years.¹ At the same time Soviet trade unions called on writers to visit factories in order to observe and describe the labour and way of life of ordinary workers. The organisation of trips to factories and construction sites was undertaken by newspapers and journals such as Pravda, Izvestiya and 30 dnei. Thus, the term 'social demand' (sotszakaz) came to mean the imposition on writers of set tasks and particular themes connected with the industrialisation of the country and collectivisation of agriculture. The idea of sotszakaz had occurred earlier, notably in the work of Mayakovskii,² but from 1929 it dominated Soviet literature.³

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1. See V. Ozerov, Polveka sovetskoi literatury (M., 1967), p. 163.
 2. See especially the end of Mayakovskii's poem of 1925, 'Domoi'. Sobranie sochinenii (M., 1956-61), vol. 7, pp. 92-5. Mayakovskii's contribution to the notion of sotszakaz has been emphasised by Harriet Borland, Soviet Literary Theory and Practice during the First Five Year Plan 1928-32 (reprint New York, 1969), pp. 26-30.
 3. There has been some disagreement about the attitude of RAPP to sotszakaz and its role in the implementation of the policy. Harriet Borland considers sotszakaz to be 'a theory of RAPP', Soviet Literary Theory and Practice..., p. 30. E.J. Brown, on the other hand, is at some pains to stress that the term derived from LEF theories and was not associated narrowly with RAPP. (The Proletarian Episode in Russian Literature 1928-32 (reprint New York, 1971), pp. 64-66.) Brown's case is convincingly argued. Nevertheless, at the time when sotszakaz was being advocated - when non-proletarian authors were being urged to turn to industrial and agricultural themes - RAPP was at its most vocal, due, no doubt, to the Party resolution of December 1928 which effectively reversed the tolerant attitude established in 1925. In these conditions, it is natural that RAPP came to be associated with sotszakaz.

Writing in 1957 Kataev recalled his early involvement in the literary Five Year Plan:

Так мне видятся теперь уже далекое, но все же необычайно близкие 30-е годы. Для меня их начало - это участие во "Всесоюзном дне ударника", подписание договора о шефстве, которое над нами, группой московских писателей, взяли рабочие станкостроительного завода "Красный пролетарий".¹

The "All Union Shock Workers' Day" mentioned by Kataev took place in October 1930 and consisted of visits to several Moscow factories by about eighty writers and composers.² However, it did not in fact mark the beginning of Kataev's visits to factories, for the previous year he had written an account of his visit to the Moscow Brake Factory and to the model commune Gerol'd as well as his play Avangard. Taken together these works mark a most inauspicious start to the literature of sotszakaz for Kataev.

In the summer of 1929 Kataev visited the State Moscow Brake Factory and reported on his visit in an article in Literaturnaya gazeta entitled 'To, chto ya videl'.³ The aim of Kataev's visit was to report on what he saw at the factory and in particular on the implementation of socialist competition, for in accordance with the policy introduced early in 1929 the factory had entered into socialist competition with another factory. It was normal for writers to produce short reports on their visits to factories and communes, and frequently these sketches were highly impressionistic.⁴ To, chto ya videl,

1. 'Nepovtorimye geroicheskie dni', Literaturnaya gazeta, 5 September 1957. Later in 8, 298.

2. See L. Skorino, Pisatel' i ego vremya, pp. 214-5.

3. 'To, chto ya videl', Literaturnaya gazeta, 1 July 1929.

4. See Harriet Borland, Soviet Literary Theory and Practice..., p. 62.

however, sparked off an argument of considerable vehemence, for certain workers at the brake factory felt that the author trivialised their work.

Kataev's first impression of the factory hardly accorded with his notion of what socialist competition would involve:

На заводском дворе посередине отлично устроенного газона, бьет в три струи небольшой фонтан. Вокруг травы, на свежавыкрашенных скамьях отдыхают рабочие... Судя по их одежде и обуви, по их манере ходить, сидеть и закуривать папиросу - они все хорошо устроены материально и чувствуют себя хозяевами своего производства... Вообще же, вся эта живописная картина обеденного перерыва являет собою вид глубочайшего бытового благополучия, довольства и даже, я бы сказал, инерции,¹

The entire scene in the factory was very far removed from the author's romantic conception of socialist competition:

...сама природа которого содержит в себе полное отрицание благополучия, довольства и инерции. Соревнование ж это неудовлетворенность, движение, целеустремленность, борьба, повышенная температура, учащенный пульс, жила на лбу.²

Kataev frankly admits that he has no interest in output figures or in the wording of the agreements and protocols. In a paragraph which was to engender a particularly violent reaction from the workers he recalls that Lenin always wanted to know what had been done, not what would be done. With one or two exceptions the workers lack the feeling of solidarity - one for all and all for one - which Kataev sees as a necessary pre-requisite of socialist competition.³ Instead, most content themselves with a lower output than they are capable of because they lack the true communal spirit of socialist

1. 'To, chto ya videl'.

2. 'To, chto ya videl'.

3. It is noteworthy that Kataev attaches so much importance to what might be called 'the three musketeers' aspect of socialist competition. His attitude to the Five Year Plan is frankly romantic and literary. In a similar way the attitude of many of his heroes to the Civil War had been coloured by Romantic literature.

competition. Thus the task facing those in positions of responsibility is to make the workers realise: 'что революция продолжается, хотя и приняла иные, так сказать, производственные формы.'¹ Many writers, including Kataev himself in the novel Vremya, vpered!, were to describe the period of socialist construction in terms reminiscent of the Revolution and Civil War, so that in the sketch 'To, chto ya videl' Kataev is anticipating one of the principal features of the literature of the first Five Year Plan period. Kataev's sketch closes with a plea for an end to inertia and concern for personal comfort and for an attitude to competition which would, indeed, involve 'struggle, a raised temperature, a quickened pulse, a vein standing out on the forehead'.

Kataev's sketches drew immediate rejoinders in the shape of articles in Molodaya gvardiya and Komsomol'skaya pravda. Writing in the former journal, G. Aleksandrov accused Kataev of consciously slandering the proletariat and of interpreting socialist competition in an unhealthy way (an accusation which anticipates attacks made on Vremya, vpered!). Aleksandrov's article was followed by a selection of comments made by workers at the brake factory, all of them hostile to Kataev who had, it was felt, written a hurried sketch based on the most superficial impression. Almost all of the published comments touch on Kataev's middle class origins and his lack of understanding of the proletariat (the words barchuk, barskii and ofitser figure prominently).² N. Yakovlev's reply to Kataev's article,

1. 'To, chto ya videl'.

2. G. Aleksandrov, 'V. Kataev i P. Pavlenko o sovetskikh rabochikh', Molodaya gvardiya, 1929, No. 16, pp. 75-7. The article is followed by a selection of workers' comments under the heading 'Zhivye svideteli', pp. 77-8.

published in Komsomol'skaya pravda, which was even more hostile, once again emphasised the superficiality of the author's acquaintance with the factory and his alienation from the type of people who work in factories.¹

The dispute over 'To, chto ya videl' continued with an editorial in Literaturnaya gazeta partially defending Kataev from Yakovlev's attack.² While admitting the many faults in 'To, chto ya videl' the editorial writer deplores the tone of Yakovlev's reply which was purely destructive rather than constructive. In an interesting paragraph which reveals the contemporary concern to win over Fellow Travellers to active support for the regime the editor writes:

'Способствует ли такая критика воспитанию, переделке и самого Валентина Катаева и других ему подобных писателей? Мы думаем, что нет.'

In August 1929 Kataev's second sketch on economic themes appeared in the journal 30 dnei. Earlier that summer the journal had arranged for several writers, including Kataev, to visit the model commune Gerol'd which had been set up by people who had returned to Russia from America after the Revolution. The author's impressions of the commune were contained in the sketch 'Puteshestvie v stranu budushchego', which is a highly romantic, idealised view of commune life.³ The narrow selfish attitudes which Kataev detected at the brake factory are alien to the inhabitants of the commune, who share equally in labour and profits and who maintain the

1. N. Yakovlev, 'Poshlyaki na literaturnykh gastrolyakh', Komsomol'skaya pravda, 13 July 1929.

2. 'Ne pomoshch' a pomekha', Literaturnaya gazeta, 22 July 1929.

3. V. Kataev, 'Puteshestvie v stranu budushchego', 30 dnei, 1929, No. 8, pp. 24-37.

very young and the very old at communal expense.

The buoyant tone of Kataev's sketch matches his positive view of the model commune. His manner is often cheerfully mock-heroic as in the description of the crowded chicken coop in which: 'не один из них, вероятно, погиб смертью храбрых под сапогом экскурсанта.'¹ Or again, speaking of the flock of cockerels: 'Право же, это не петухи, а легендарные белые павлины Саломеи.'² The human inhabitants of the commune are also subjected to Kataev's mock-heroic descriptions. Thus a tractor driver becomes a new type of centaur: 'В седле сидит голый по пояс, блестящий тракторист. И он и его машина представляют из себя как бы нечто неделимо-цельное. Этаким кентавр: человекофордзон. Кентавр, сотрясая воздух, делает по двору несколько неуклюже-проворных восьмерок.'³

The style of 'Puteshestvie v stranu budushchego' is fast-moving with considerable use made of the brief, extremely pictorial, verbless phrases which were to play a prominent part in Vremya, vpered!. The sketch opens with a series of terse snapshots appropriate to the genre, the aim of which was to convey first impressions: 'Обыкновенная русская станция. Чудное утро. Большое кудрявое дерево. Под деревом - тень.'⁴ Having thus set the scene, Kataev introduces a more complex, self-consciously literary manner of description reminiscent of stories of the 1920s such as Otets or Rodion Zhukov: 'Розовая водочка округло, как придаточное предложение, завершает железнодорожный пейзаж.'⁵

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1. 'Puteshestvie v stranu budushchego', p. 29.
 2. 'Puteshestvie v stranu budushchego', p. 30.
 3. 'Puteshestvie v stranu budushchego', p. 31.
 4. 'Puteshestvie v stranu budushchego', p. 24.
 5. 'Puteshestvie v stranu budushchego', p. 24.

The major theme of the sketch is the innovatory quality of the new commune which, like a microcosm of the whole country in this period of construction and collectivisation has turned its back on the old way of life in favour of something new and exciting. Nature, too, seems to be at a crossroads, or at least the author who chooses to describe nature finds himself at one. Nature itself may not have changed since Turgenev's day, but so important is the change in man and society that the old descriptions no longer suffice. Having described a cloud as 'Turgenevan' Kataev goes on to say: 'Прощайте, товарищ Тургенев. Вам направо, а нам налево.'¹ After centuries of stagnation society must now develop rapidly. Increased tempos are required in all aspects of life, and nature has consequently been invaded by men desperate to build and change and progress. 'Только что было поле, а теперь вместо поля - деревья и службы.'² Once again 'Puteshestvie v stranu budushchego' anticipates Vremya, vpered! and demonstrates that many of the preoccupations revealed in that novel arose before Kataev's visit to Magnitostroi.

Although the themes of communal farming and industrialisation were new to Kataev, the style of his sketches resembles that of his earlier stories in several important respects. Like Olesha, Kataev is frequently struck by a purely external similarity between objects which are essentially very different, and his comparisons have a purely visual impact, for no further reverberation at another level is possible. 'Возвращаемся обратно мимо пасеки. Ульи стоят под яблонями. Они похожи на копилки. Узкие скважины облеплены черными пчелами. Пчелы

1. 'Puteshestvie v stranu budushchego', p. 25.

2. 'Puteshestvie v stranu budushchego', p. 26.

накипают на злых губах лобастых деревянных истуканов.¹

In Kataev's search for original comparisons between things which have no real similarity save a visual resemblance, perspective and angle of vision become important factors. Objects which are dissimilar because of a difference of scale may appear similar when viewed from different distances or unusual angles, as in the following example:

Вдалеке на огороде - работающие люди. Это - девушки-коммунарки. Их головы обвязаны нежнейшими розоватыми платками. Они наклоняются над грядками. Плавно поднимаются и опускаются суховатые их руки. ²Издали девушки похожи на поспевшую землянику.

As with the Civil War stories, so here Kataev invests an important national event with a romantic aura which replaces the reality with an idealised, essentially literary world in which the farm becomes a cowboy ranch from a work by O'Henry and, as noted earlier, the tractor driver is a centaur and the cocks are the legendary white peacocks of Salome.

The qualities of Kataev's sketch are that it has humour and that it is pleasingly literary, but being merely a sketch it is necessarily hurried and superficial. Moreover, the fact that the theme is an imposed one results in a failure to understand, or even attempt to understand, the realities of a communal farm. Kataev has approached his set theme as he might approach any phenomenon which had to be described, attempting to convey the external appearance of the farm and to capture in a few details the spirit of optimism which he perceives there, or which, at any rate, he wishes to perceive. Within the limits of an impressionistic sketch such an approach

1. 'Puteshestvie v stranu budushchego', p. 32.

2. 'Puteshestvie v stranu budushchego', p. 26.

is acceptable, and indeed inevitable unless the writer spends several weeks on the site. But a full scale work of literature requires to be set more specifically in a milieu which the author understands, and so when Kataev translated his very limited experience of communal farms into the material for a play, Avangard, it was only to be expected that the artificiality of the imposed theme would vitiate any artistic merit which the work might have.

4.2 Avangard

Avangard has been justifiably criticised as one of the weakest of Kataev's works and it is one which the author chose to omit from his collected works. It was written in response to a trend in the Soviet theatre towards portrayal of village and communal farm life, which was itself part of the social command. One theatre critic lists five such plays (including Avangard) which were running concurrently in Moscow in the winter of 1929-30, the titles of which included Uragan, Diktatura and Yarost'.¹ All of these plays were similar, so that, as the critic remarks, a person who had seen, say, Yarost', had no need to see Uragan. The principal defect of all the plays lay in their hasty superficiality and their failure to translate political processes into the genuine language of the theatre. The drama critic of Izvestiya pinpoints the failure of Avangard when he writes:

Назалось бы все на месте: и большая деревенская тема, и два взгляда на задачи колхозного движения,

1. N. Skuba, 'O derevenskoi tematike vooobshche i ob Avangarde v chastnosti', Sovetskii teatr, 1930, No. 3-4, pp. 18-20.

олицетворенные в двух типах коммунистов, и личная драма, вплетенная в драму социальную. И все-таки пьеса В. Катаева слишком рассудочна, написана холодным пером. И оттого действующие лица, несмотря на их сугубую злободневность, выглядят шахматными фигурами, передвигаемыми по сценической доске.¹

The fundamental conflict of Avangard is, like that of Vremya, vpered!, between caution and daring. Chorba, the chairman of the Avangard commune, advocates a steady increase in its size, whereas his deputy, Maiorov, is in favour of immediate expansion and proposes to invite many more peasants into the commune. In a key speech typical of the literature of the first Five Year Plan in its advocacy of increased tempos, Maiorov says:

Днем и ночью бой. Плотина растет. Каждый час вода на метр подымается. Смотри, двух лет не пройдет - мы на твои керосиновые тракторы и смотреть не станем. Электричеством пахать будем... Тут, через пять лет громаднейший комбинат будет. Места не узнаешь! Промышленный центр. Химические заводы. Свое удобрение. Оросительные каналы. Два урожая в год. Днем и ночью. При электричестве. Я дальше твоего вижу, Чорба. Слышишь, по всему Союзу земля под ногами ходит! Смотри!² Я все вижу. Как будто в руках своих держу.

The ideological conflict between Chorba and Maiorov is complicated by a personal rivalry for the love of Polina, Chorba's wife, who takes Maiorov's side in the argument over expansion and who eventually falls in love with the deputy chairman. In the end Maiorov perishes at the hands of dissatisfied peasants who fail to see that temporary setbacks will be overcome; Chorba goes mad because Maiorov has taken

1. N. Volkov, 'Avangard', Izvestiya, 24 April 1930.

2. V. Kataev, Avangard, P'esy (M., 1955), p. 29.

from him everything which he holds dear, and Polina is left weeping, but the commune flourishes.

Avangard was produced in Moscow by the Vakhtangov theatre and in Leningrad by the Bol'shoi Dramaticheskii Teatr, which chose the play for its main production of the 1930 season.¹ All the reviews were mixed, praising the general idea of the play and its construction but criticising its superficiality and political naivety. V. Mlechin, writing in Vechernyaya Moskva, makes an extremely telling diagnosis of the play's principal fault: 'автор сам еще недостаточно крепко проникся теми идеями, за которые в его пьесе гибнет Майоров.'² Mlechin's criticism could be levelled against most of the social command literature of the first Five Year Plan period; in very few works does the ring of conviction and understanding dispel the impression that the theme is essentially alien to the author, and consequently few works of merit have survived from this period. Avangard is one of the many artistic failures of the period because the author's heart was not in it and his knowledge of the issues involved was insufficient. Yet it cannot be ignored in a study of Kataev's work, for only by comparing Vremya, vpered! with the earlier play can one see the extent to which Kataev's attitudes evolved in the first two years of the new decade. The fundamental issue in the novel is the same as that in the play, but

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1. The Leningrad theatre issued a booklet entitled Avangard (L., 1930), about its work on Kataev's play. It contains comments by the theatre's Artistic and Political Committee on the importance of improving the political message of the play.
 2. V. Mlechin, 'Avangard teatra im. Vakhtangova', Vechernyaya Moskva, 27 March 1930.

the author's technical knowledge and personal involvement lift the novel to heights rarely, if ever, equalled in this bleak period of Soviet literature.

4.3 'Porogi'

Through his friendship with Dem'yan Bednyi, which began in the early 1920s, Kataev was able to travel in the comfort of the famous poet's private railway carriage from one construction site to another, and in the course of 1930 he travelled with Bednyi to Dneprostoi, Rostsel'mash and, finally, Magnitogorsk. The first of these visits was to an area which Kataev had known eleven years earlier during the Civil War and he conceived the idea for a sketch based on the enormous change which had taken place on the Dnepr, as in the entire country, in the course of those years. The resulting sketch, entitled 'Porogi' was published in July 1930 and is by far the most interesting of Kataev's social command sketches.¹ In it the author returns to a period of his life which was dear to him and attempts to recapture the poetic mood of a particular summer evening when, as a young soldier, he had hired a boat for the night and sailed down the Dnepr. By using all of his senses Kataev recreates the experiences of a night when he was especially impressionable:

Вскоре дорога пошла круто вниз. Я ощутил реку прежде, чем ее увидел. Пресная свежесть воды охватила меня с ног до головы. Я почувствовал острый запах осоки. Почва под ногами стала легкой и упругой. Я узнал ее сразу. Это был толстый пласт высохшего ила, смешанного с тиной и обломками камыша. Совсем близко раздался крик лягушки, сходный со скребущим звуком ножа, открывающего раковину. (8,218)

1. 'Porogi', 30 dnei, 1930, No. 7, pp. 12-21. Later in the collected works 8,217-31. References to this edition.

In order to add authenticity to his recreation of the mood of that evening, he quotes two of his poems written in 1919 and inspired by the night spent on the river. The verses are typical of Kataev's work in that genre, being brief, sensuous pictures of a definite scene with concrete details and precise observation; moreover, the scenes they portray are peaceful and unchanging and the atmosphere is almost one of indolence. The distant sound of guns as Ataman Chaikovskii's forces fire on a passing steamer merely seems to add to the peacefulness of the author's immediate surroundings, and he is more concerned to recall the subtly changing light than to emphasise the presence of hostile soldiers: 'Послышался шум порогов. Приближалось утро. Вода и небо обменялись тонами. Раньше вода была светлей неба. Теперь небо стало светлей воды.' (8,219)

Having successfully resurrected the atmosphere of Aleksandrovs'k and the Dnepr in 1919, Kataev turns in the second half of his sketch to the same region eleven years later when everything has altered. Aleksandrovs'k is now called Zaporozh'e and the peaceful countryside has been transformed into the scene of a gigantic industrial complex in which preparations are being made for war, as in the later Vremya, vpered!.

Площадки и вагоны были гружены лесом, туфом, железом, цементом, песком, продовольствием.

Подобное движение бывает в ближайшем тылу очень важного участка военного фронта перед решительными операциями.

Местность все более походила на прифронтовую полосу. Гора вырытой почвы - светло-желтая насыпь фортификаций - пересекла ландшафт. (8,224)

So complete is the change which has overtaken the country that Kataev asserts that his old style, which had so accurately conveyed the atmosphere and the sensual reality of the Dnepr eleven years before, can no longer express the mood of the era and must give way to a new style:

Эпоха разошлась со стилем. Старые формы не отвечают более объему и качеству нового содержания. Так же, как этот имеющий для меня одиннадцатилетнюю давность пейзаж не в состоянии был вместить в себя признаков нового своего назначения и места в мире.
(8,223)

These words are of the greatest importance for the development of Kataev's work in the 1930s, for they demonstrate that to a certain extent the author deliberately turned his back on the style which had dominated his work in the previous decade and which had been considerably influenced by Bunin's. The leisurely observation and accurate re-creation of physical details and sense impressions which had formed the basis of Kataev's poetry and had been a major element in his prose would now have to give way to a style more in keeping with an era of increased tempos. Of course, such a style was not alien to Kataev. If it had been then Vremya, vpered! could hardly have been the artistic success it was. In Ostrov Ereendorf, Povelitel' zheleza and, above all, Zimoi, Kataev had made use of very brief sentences and paragraphs and had abandoned the normal rules of sentence structure in order to create an impression of feverish haste or to sustain the pace of a melodramatic adventure story. There can be no question of Kataev suddenly and irrevocably changing from a style which could be called Buninesque to a more feverishly

expressionistic one. Rather does he make a conscious effort to use an already existing strain in his work, believing it to be more appropriate to the era of the Five Year Plan. That this strain (and the changed political attitude which could not but be associated with it in the period of peredelka) came to be connected in Kataev's mind with the name of Mayakovskii was probably due to the circumstances surrounding the choice of the name Vremya, vpered! for Kataev's major work of the period which will be discussed below.

The second half of 'Porogi' provides an example of the vigorous style later used in Vremya, vpered!

Площадки были нагружены глыбами гранита.
Оглушительный гул сотрясал изнутри стены.
Земля ходила под ногами.

Наменная пыль, мелкая как мука, тонким
туманом стояла вокруг здания, напоминавшего
паровую мельницу.

Это, впрочем, и была мельница, только
мельница превращавшая глыбы гранита в щебень
- камнедробилка.

Мимо часового мы вошли внутрь. Визг и
грохот стоял адский. Не слышно было
собственного голоса. (8,228)

In the great stylistic contrast between its two halves 'Porogi' looks backwards and forwards. The title of the sketch refers to the river rapids which are symbolic of the power and turbulence of the new era, and also, possibly, to the other meaning of the word, namely, 'threshold'. Kataev sees this sketch as heralding a new age, an age which demands a new style.

4.4 Vremya, vpered!

4.4.1 Vremya, vpered! as a Transitional Work

Sketches such as 'To, chto ya videl' and 'Puteshestvie v stranu budushchego' partially satisfied the demand for a literary response to the Five Year Plan, but at the same time longer (and presumably less ephemeral) works were also required. Among the many novels about the first Five Year Plan the most notable are Gladkov's Energiya, Erenburg's Den' vtoroi, Leonov's Sot' and Shaginyan's Gidrotsentral'. To these must be added Kataev's novel Vremya, vpered!, one of the few works of the period which can be described as entertaining.

In order to understand the significance of Vremya, vpered! in the corpus of Kataev's work one must take account of the phenomenon of peredelka, which was taking place in Soviet literature in the years 1929-1931 and which has already been mentioned in this dissertation.¹ Enough has been said concerning the attack on Kataev by Mashbits-Verov to suggest the great pressure on Fellow Travellers to change their outlook and style. In June 1929 Kataev and several other Fellow Travellers, including Olesha, answered a questionnaire entitled 'Pisateli o meshchanstve' for Na literaturnom postu. In his reply Kataev briefly discusses the various types of meshchanstvo to which writers are prone and picks out in particular the habit

1. See pp. 180-1.

of disguising old, bourgeois morality as Communist ideology. It is a reply which illustrates the contortions of hypocrisy which writers such as Kataev felt obliged to perform in the face of RAPP hostility.¹ The following year another questionnaire, this time for Literaturnaya gazeta, drew a sycophantic reply from Kataev to the question: 'Чего мы ждем от пролетарского литературного движения?' His five wishes were:

Жду, во-первых, революции в области формы. Во-вторых, дружеского руководства и помощи в поисках темы и в выработке широкого политического и философского созерцания. В-третьих, обстоятельной, серьезной, внимательной и принципиальной критики. В-четвертых, создания вокруг советского писателя атмосферы искреннего полного доверия и уважения к его трудной и ответственной работе. В-пятых, вовлечения так называемых попутчиков (между прочим терпеть не могу этой соглашательской клички), и меня в том числе, к постоянной работе ассоциации пролетписателей хотя бы в дискуссионном порядке, и без права решающего голоса.²

Taken together these five wishes demonstrate the difficulties faced by the Fellow Travellers. Numbers two and three seem particularly important, with the references to a political and philosophical outlook and to the nature of proletarian criticism of literature (the first part of Mashbits-Verov's article appeared in the same month as Kataev's reply to the questionnaire).

Kataev's visits to several major industrial sites in the company of Dem'yan Bednyi provided him with the material

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1. 'Pisateli o meshchanstve', Na literaturnom postu, 1929, No. 6, p. 29. Olesha's reply to the same questionnaire was more daring, and is worth quoting to illustrate the hostility between RAPP critics and some Fellow Travellers at this time: Не задавайте мне таких вопросов. Получается бессмыслица. Ведь я, как писатель-попутчик, считаюсь отражением мелкобуржуазных настроений. Я - мелкий мещанин с вашей точки зрения. Всякий писатель, не состоящий в ВАППе или "Нузнце" есть с этой точки зрения мелкий мещанин.
 2. 'Chego my zhdem ot proletarskogo literaturnogo dvizheniya?', Literaturnaya gazeta, 24 September 1930.

upon which to base the change in outlook and style demanded by those who took up the cry of peredelka. Writing in 1933, after the publication of Vremya, vpered!, Kataev attributed his change of attitude largely to the effect of his travels. 'Видеть собственными глазами, как наша страна превращается из аграрной в индустриальную, это значит перестраивать свое писательское мировоззрение... Меня поездки по нашей стране наполняли чувством невероятной гордости.'¹

Faced with the necessity of having to change the philosophy underlying his works, Kataev was enabled by his visits to Magnitogorsk, Dneprostroi, and the Stalingrad tractor factory to find an aspect of the new society which touched a natural chord in himself - namely, that romantic aspect of socialist construction which he had advocated in 'To, chto ya videl'. Thus, for Kataev peredelka was less traumatic than for some other authors. A less charitable view of the change in Kataev (and Olesha) is given by Nadezhda Mandel'shtam when she says:

Среди циников была и более приятная порода, выполнявшая заказы, чтобы покупать за дешевую цену девочек, а за дорогую - еду и одежду. Одни, продаваясь, роняли слезу, как Олеша, другие облизывались, как Катаев. Почему-то все желали идти с веком наравне. Никогда тема сегодняшнего дня, современности, не звучала так назойливо. Все желали быть современниками, людьми сегодняшнего дня и смертельно боялись отстать.²

Whether one inclines towards Kataev's own view of the reasons behind the change in his outlook or to that of Nadezhda Mandel'shtam, there can be no doubt that the adoption

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1. 'Pisateli i sotsialisticheskoe stroitel'stvo', Rost, 1933, No. 11-12, p. 10.
 2. N. Mandel'shtam, Vtoraya kniga, p. 588.

of a position of active support for the government (which began with Vremya, vpered!) had the most profound effect on Kataev's work. While many similarities remain between the work of the 1930s and that of the previous decade, the novels and plays of the 1930s are unified by an underlying expression of support for the Soviet government which was to remain a constant feature of Kataev's works (albeit changing greatly in form and in subtlety). To this extent it is true to say, as Kataev did, that Vremya, vpered! was a critical transitional work.¹

It is no accident that the work which Kataev came to regard as crucial in his development as a Soviet writer should be closely associated with the name of Mayakovskii, for it was he above all others whom Kataev regarded as a Soviet poet. There had been hints of Mayakovskii's influence earlier in Kataev's work, but only with the writing of Vremya, vpered! and open adoption of a pro-government stance did Mayakovskii begin to vie with Bunin as a figure to be emulated by Kataev.

Many times in interviews, articles and artistic works Kataev has returned to the story of his choice of title for Vremya, vpered!; it is clearly a story which he considers important (and possibly flattering) for it links him strongly with Mayakovskii. The title is taken from 'Marsh vremeni' which Mayakovskii wrote at the beginning of 1930 for inclusion in his play Banya. In one version of the story Kataev says:

1. V. Kataev, 'Raport semnadtsatomu', p. 104.

Я встретил его на улице Горького, он остановил меня и сказал: "А я еще дам для Бани - Марш времени," Он нес его к Мейерхольду и прочел мне, тут же, на ходу, в ритм своих стремительных шагов...

Я сказал: "Чудесное название для романа - Время, вперед! Мы опережаем время нашими стройками, жизнью, развитием. Это вы правильно нашли."

Маяковский ответил: "Вот вы и напишите. Я романов не пишу."

Он умер. Я попал в Магнитогорск. И увидел бригады, темпы. Романа еще не было, но я знал, что напишу Время, вперед!¹

4.4.2 The Genesis of Vremya, vpered!

After several flying visits in the company of Dem'yan Bednyi to major construction sites Kataev arrived at Magnitogorsk in the spring of 1931. Realising that in order to gather material for a full length work he would have to stay for several months, he returned to Moscow to complete some unfinished business, then, acting as a special correspondent for several newspapers and journals, he arrived in Magnitogorsk in May 1931 and was thus on the site at the height of the period of feverish socialist competition.

In the first quarter of 1931 the massive work force at Magnitogorsk (almost 62,000 strong) was reorganised on a brigade basis because the previous artel' organisation had not resulted in sufficient productivity. Indeed at the very beginning of the year the low productivity at Magnitostroi had been the subject of a Central Committee resolution. In

1. L. Skorino, Pisatel' i ego vremya, pp. 218-9. The essence of this conversation was repeated by Kataev in an interview with the present author 18 May 1971.

order to meet deadlines for the opening of the new blast furnaces extremely high productivity was required in the spring and summer of 1931. The method by which it was hoped to obtain these results was that of socialist competition by brigades of shock-workers who undertook to compete with each other on one site as well as with brigades from other sites. On 29 May a brigade under brigadier Sagadeev laid 429 mixes of concrete in the one shift, breaking the world record and succeeding in their socialist competition against the workers of Kuznetskstroï. Two days later the triumph was reported in the local newspaper Magnitogorskii rabochii in an article written by Kataev and two journalists, A. Smolyan (to whom Vremya, vpered! is dedicated) and A. Kazakov.¹ The engineer responsible for Sagadeev's record, M.A. Tamarkin, also contributed an article on the subject to Magnitogorskii rabochii in which he emphasised the benefits to be derived from the conveyor-like efficiency of the brigade system. Tamarkin served as the prototype of Kataev's hero Margulies, while the fictional brigadier Ishchenko was based on Sagadeev.²

Vremya, vpered! was published in serial form in Krasnaya nov' from January to September 1932 provoking an immediate critical response which will be examined later. It was by far Kataev's longest work to date and it is one of the few novels of the first Five Year Plan period which can still be read with pleasure. Thus, Kataev's hopes for his novel expressed in his report to the Seventeenth Party Congress,

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1. 'Entuziazm - planovost' - pobeda', Magnitogorskii rabochii, 31 May 1931.
 2. This account of the real events described in fictionalised form in Vremya, vpered! is based on the account given by L. Skorino, Pisatel' i ego vremya, pp. 225-39.

have largely been fulfilled: 'Я хотел, чтобы моя хроника, мобилизуя современного читателя, сохранила свою ценность и для читателя будущего, являясь для него хроникой как бы "исторической".'¹

4.4.3 Construction of the Novel

The story of the attempt by a brigade of construction workers to beat the world record for the number of concrete mixes laid in a shift is very simple, and apparently too slight to support a fairly long novel. Yet Kataev manages to limit the time span of the novel to the one day of the record attempt with no substantial flashbacks to provide background details. He does so by widening his canvas to include a surprising number of characters (more than seventy in all) and taking them all through the crucial day, switching frequently from one set of characters to another. Thus, there are two main elements in the construction of the work; a straightforward temporal element (the single day of the record attempt) which gives the work an overall unity; and a multitude of characters differing in nationality, social class and attitudes, who account for the novel's broad scope.

Kataev originally intended to cover the work of all three shifts during the day in question² but finally concentrated on the middle shift worked by Ishchenko's brigade. However, the three part structure dictated by the original

1. 'Raport semnadtsatomu', p. 105.

2. 'Pisateli na Magnitostroe. Beseda s A. Malyshkinym i V. Kataevym', Literaturnaya gazeta, 11 March 1932.

conception corresponded to setting, main action and denouement, and while the shifts of Ermakov and Khanumov (the other two brigade leaders) diminished in importance, the tripartite structure remains. In Chapters two to forty one Kataev sets the scene, introducing all of the characters and situations (Chapter one is postponed until near the end of the novel for reasons which will be discussed below). In comparison with the feverish activity of the record breaking shift these early chapters appear almost leisurely. Kataev introduces so many story lines that it seems that he must lose control, but such a long introduction proves essential because once the description of Ishchenko's shift begins there is no time for character or situation development. These chapters (forty two to sixty one) are devoted almost entirely to action, to the many difficulties met and overcome in the record attempt, and in order to be free to concentrate on the action Kataev had to ensure that his characters and their situations were already familiar to the reader. Finally, the later chapters, sixty two to sixty nine (and also the transposed Chapter one) serve as a denouement: those situations which had been interrupted by the feverish activity of Ishchenko's shift, such as Fenya's confinement and Klava's journey away from Korneev and Magnitogorsk, are concluded as the day draws to its close.

The major theme of the novel is that of time. Its very title epitomises the idea of the race against the natural pace of time, of what is called in the novel 'the struggle for increased pace' ('bor'ba za tempy'). In this respect

Vremya, vpered! reflects the major concern of the period when it was written. 1931 was the third year of the Five Year Plan when workers were constantly being exhorted to complete the Plan in four years. The construction of the novel, therefore, based as it is on time, was highly appropriate to the period and the theme. It is worth noting that although the ticking of the clock seems ever present in the background of the novel (there are many references to the time of day), time seems to be a function of work rather than an immutable concept. Thus, the first third of the day, while Ermakov's shift is working, passes relatively slowly and occupies forty chapters. Then, when the decisive shift begins, time seems to speed up in accordance with the smooth rhythm of the work. Finally, as the shift nears its end and the record is in sight, time once more comes into sharp focus as each minute and each new mix of concrete are measured against each other. Once the record has been surpassed the remaining minutes of the shift once more pass smoothly and rhythmically to the clank of the mixer.¹

While the most obvious element in the construction of the work is the factor of time, including the three shifts, it is not the only one. Another important constructional principle is that of contrast operating at several levels. For example, among the characters there is a stark, almost schematic contrast between Margulies and Nalbandov, between Semechkin and Vinkich, between Fenya and Klava. The fundamental

1. Interest in the nature of time was very high in the Soviet Union during the 1920s and early 1930s. The works of Bergson and Einstein were frequently discussed in the press.

conflict of the novel is neatly summed up in the contrast between two slogans, each associated with one of the engineers. Margulies believes in the slogan: 'темпы в эпоху реконструкции решают все'; whereas Nalbandov's phrase is: 'конструкция не французская борьба.' Other contrasts used effectively by Kataev include that between Europe and Asia; between the new, artificial city of Magnitogorsk and traditional cities which bear the imprint of time and civilisation in the shape of churches and public buildings. The reliance on stark contrasts as a compositional device is indicative of the single dimension plakatnost' of much of Vremya, vpered!, including almost all of the characters. An obvious aspect of the device of contrast is the use of parallel scenes at the beginning and the end of the novel. One woman (Fenya) passes from Europe to Asia to join her husband at Magnitogorsk; another woman (Klava) leaves Magnitogorsk for the material comfort of the European part of the Soviet Union. In both cases the train journey is accompanied by extracts from a speech by Stalin about the need for speedy industrialisation, acting as a framework for the novel.¹

Finally, in this examination of the construction of Vremya, vpered! mention must be made of what several critics have called Kataev's cinematic technique.² Even before Vremya, vpered! the cinema had exerted a considerable influence on Kataev, and several of his works had been written or adapted for the cinema. The most obvious cinematic feature of Kataev's

1. Compare Chapter three of Vremya, vpered! with Chapter sixty eight. The Stalin speech which plays an important role in Vremya, vpered! was delivered on 4 February 1931 to the first All-Union Conference of leading personnel of socialist industry, and printed in Pravda, 5 February 1931.
2. See, for example, E.J. Brown, Russian Literature since the Revolution, p. 133.

novels and stories - their division into a great many short chapters - was noted as early as 1925 by V. Krasil'nikov, the reviewer of Bezdel'nik Eduard.¹ In his memoirs Il'ya Kremlev recalls the author's fascination with the cinema and recounts an anecdote about their cooperation on an adaptation of Povelitel' zheleza for the screen.²

Kataev himself was aware of the influence of the cinema on his work and in 1936 he wrote a brief article entitled 'Rovesniki kino' in which he touches on the ways in which the techniques of the cinema find an echo in his writing.

Элементы кинематографического монтажа, самое понятие монтаж стало для многих писателей моего поколения органическим понятием в нашей работе. Я до сих пор говорю - "монтировать рассказ".

Некоторые мои ранние произведения - Остров Эрендорф и ряд рассказов - написаны под явным влиянием кинематографа. Заметно влияние кино и в повести Растратчики, где много чисто кинематографических реминисценций. Я широко применил там прием крупного плана, чисто кинематографическое обыгрывание вещей в их кинематографической сущности. (8,314)

Later in the same article Kataev turns to the influence of the cinema on Vremya, vpered!, and concludes that his handling of time in the novel is derived from the cinema: 'Кино научило меня как писателя более свободному обращению со временем. Время, вперед! произведение, построенное буквально по принципу кино.' (8,314)

Kataev was by no means the only author of this period to employ cinematic techniques in the construction of novels. One author who stood out by virtue of his cinematic technique

1. See note 1, p. 174.

2. I. Kremlev, V literaturnom stroyu, pp. 202-3.

and who undoubtedly influenced Kataev's novel was the American John Dos Passos about whom a great deal was written in the Soviet press at the end of the 1920s following his visit to the USSR. The novels of Dos Passos made striking use of documentary material and newspaper reports in presenting a broad picture of society. Kataev learned much from the American and incorporated similar features in his own novels.

The influence of the cinema on Vremya, vpered! can be seen in two major areas - the handling of time (as pointed out by Kataev himself) and the visual use of details. Despite its considerable length, the action of Vremya, vpered! is confined, with very few exceptions, to the one day on which the attempt to surpass the concrete-laying record was made. The novel opens as Margulies's day begins and it closes as he and Shura wait for the canteen to open early the following morning. The only events which lie outside the period of twenty four hours are the tests on the quality of concrete, which take place seven days later and which, for that reason, are described in the transposed chapter, which is removed from the action of the story, so as not to disturb the unity of time; and, possible, Fenya's journey to Magnitogorsk, which is made to appear part of the day's events, however unlikely that may be. Kataev is able to write a long novel about the events of a single day by involving a large number of different characters and story-lines and switching constantly from one to another. Thus, all of the characters move in

parallel through the day. The use of many characters and many short chapters is not in itself cinematic. Tolstoi, for instance, employs such a method in Anna Karenina.¹ But in Kataev's case the conscious restriction in time to twenty four hours and the deliberate introduction of delaying scenes, such as those involving Bixby, the American engineer, recall the techniques of the cinema.²

The influence of the cinema on the construction of Vremya, vpered! has been noted many times by critics, and Kataev himself has commented on it in 'Rovesniki kino'. But another important point about the cinema in relation to Vremya, vpered! appears to have been ignored by critics of

1. It is interesting to note that Anna Karenina was undoubtedly in Kataev's mind just before he wrote Vremya, vpered!. The evidence for this assertion is contained in the story Na polyakh romana (1,385-402) published in September 1931, in which an important Communist official reads and re-reads Anna Karenina and argues in his own mind with Tolstoi. When read in conjunction with the almost contemporary Vremya, vpered! the story provides a useful insight into Kataev's views on the novel in general at this time. For example, the following paragraph from the story illustrates his belief that the leisurely pace of the nineteenth century novel can no longer be taken as a model in an era of rapid industrialisation. 'Роман, написанный автором в темпе пятидесяти верст в час Николаевской железной дороги, не мог выдержать скорости ста восьмидесяти километров в час пассажирского самолета советской конструкции "Н-5", распознавательный знак "250" - линии Укрвоздухпути.' (1,392)
2. A parallel may be drawn between Vremya, vpered! and the work of the popular American novelist Arthur Hailey whose novels Airport and Hotel are constructed in a similar fashion to Kataev's novel and were obviously written with the cinema in mind.

the novel, namely, Kataev's use of visual detail without authorial comment in order to convey his point. For example, in the following short paragraph Kataev contrasts the luxury in which foreigners travelled in Russian trains with the difficult conditions in an ordinary 'hard' carriage by dwelling, as a camera might, purely on the objects which exemplify the luxury.

Удивленный мальчик пошел дальше, кидая камешки в колеса вагонов. Из окна на него смотрели иностранцы в шляпах. На столиках перед окнами в стаканах были бело-зеленые пучки ландыша. Стаканы - в серебряных подстаканниках. Сухарики в пергаментной бумаге. И тяжелые медные пепельницы... (3,140)

Or again:

Сметана почти бежит.

Тесовый и толевый мир участка резко поворачивается вокруг Сметаны. Он весь в движении, весь в углах и пролетах.

Сметана видит:

Угол - пролет - турник - рукомойник - мусорный ящик - и над ним жгучий столб мух.

И в обратном порядке:

Мухи - ящик - рукомойник - турник - пролет - угол. (3,188)

In this example Kataev's description achieves the effect of a camera, sweeping in a circular motion first one way and then the other.

Occasionally a similar device is used to give a sense of the vast proportions of Magnitogorsk, as in the following example in which Georgii Vasil'evich is looking at the site through binoculars:

Баракы, палатки, дороги, столбы, изоляторы, тепляки, краны, экскаваторы, окопы, насыпи, вагоны, опалубки, горы, холмы, травы, дымы, мусор, лошади.

Маленькие человеческие фигурки, - чем дальше, тем крошечней, - очень редко разбросанные среди огромного ландшафта, казались вместе со своими малюсенькими тенями совершенно неподвижными,

как на моментальной фотографии. (3,214)

4.4.4 Widening Devices

One method by which Kataev attempts to universalise the socialist competition at Magnitogorsk is through the inclusion of a large number of contrasting characters who will be examined later in this chapter; another method is by widening the action beyond Magnitogorsk to Moscow. For the scenes of Moscow during the early years of the first Five Year Plan Kataev drew extensively on an article entitled 'Moskva etim letom' which he had published in 1930 and which gives a vivid picture of the programme of modernisation which is changing the face of Moscow literally from day to day. It opens with a paragraph which anticipates the theme and the style of Vremya, vpered!: 'Республика меняет лицо. Аграрная страна превращается в индустриальную. Всюду идет ломка, чистка, выкорчевывание, планировка, закладка, стройка.'¹ Horses are being replaced by motor cars, stables by garages. Moscow is being transported from Asia to Europe. The roads have been dug up and resemble trenches in which men fight against time and nature. And this unrelenting battle is witnessed by a constant stream of foreign tourists drawn here by curiosity and also by the irresistible pull which a doomed man feels towards the source of his destruction.

1. 'Moskva etim letom', 30 dnei, 1930, No. 9, pp. 56-65.

Even from this brief description of the contents of 'Moskva etim letom' it is clear that it contains much material which was later used in Vremya, vpered!. The foreign tourists who visit Moscow are transformed in the later work into Mr. Ray Roope who feels drawn to Magnitogorsk because in his heart he recognises that his own doom is here being created. The image of rapid construction as a battle is taken up and extended in the novel; when Ishchenko calls po tachkam to begin the decisive shift he reminds us of a Civil War commander calling his troops to horse. Above all, the rapid transformation of Moscow into a modern city is borrowed from 'Moskva etim letom'. Compare the following two passages:

Общий ремонт улиц временно превратил Москву в ад. Трамвайные и автобусные маршруты меняются ежедневно, ввечасно. (Moskva etim letom')

Ремонт превратил Москву в ад. Трамвайные маршруты менялись ежедневно. (Vremya, vpered!) (3,221)

The changes which make Magnitogorsk unrecognisable day to day are also taking place in Moscow and, indeed, all over the Soviet Union. Perhaps the clearest example of man's victory over the vast space of the country can be seen in the chapter in which Margulies first telephones Moscow. Before his connection is made he hears the voices of telephonists from other cities. In stepping into the telephone booth he shuts out time (in that the silence of the booth isolates him from the events around him) but allows distance to speak through the ingenuity of the human invention which has defeated it - the telephone:

Но едва приложил к ушам специальную трубку, вместо остановившегося времени заговорило пространство.

Оно заговорило близкими и далекими голосами телефонисток, слабым треском атмосферических разрядов, гулом несущихся километров, комариным пением сигналов, переключной городов. (3,195)

The theme of man's victory over natural forces is hinted at, symbolically, in the image of the diver with which Chapter sixteen of Vremya, vpered! closes and which is taken in its entirety from 'Moskva etim letom'. The scene consists of a very detailed description of a man diving into the new swimming pool at the Dynamo sports stadium in Moscow. Kataev's eye dwells like a slow motion camera (reminding us yet again of the influence of the cinema on the author at this stage of his career) on the surroundings and then on each stage of the dive, turning a swift movement into a slow, complex and exceedingly graceful one.

Он просто и глубоко вздыхает. Он поднимает руки и, вытянув их, соединяет над головой.

Теперь он не человек - стрела.

Он чуть покачнулся. Он медленно, незаметно для глаз, выходит из состояния равновесия.

Не торопясь и плавно разводя руки, он падает.

Нет он не падает.

Теперь он летит. Он уже не стрела а ласточка. Он подробно освещен молодым солнцем. У него напряжены лопатки и резкая выдающаяся черта посредине спины: от головы в пулевидном шлеме до поясницы.

Он в воздухе. (3,196)¹

Man's grace, beauty and technique here allow him to overcome nature, to turn a fall into a flight.

The diver accomplishes his technical feat in Moscow while Margulies and Ishchenko's victory takes place in Magnitogorsk

1. See also 'Moskva etim letom', p. 64.

but both events represent a struggle which embraces the whole nation. As Kataev himself puts it: 'В капле дождя вы научили меня видеть сад.' (3,425) What we see before our eyes may be the equivalent of a raindrop - a tiny, almost imperceptible object - but in that raindrop is reflected a whole garden.

Time and again in Vremya, vpered! Kataev emphasises the broad significance for the entire nation of what is taking place at Magnitogorsk. He frequently reminds us that there are many other sites where similar activity is taking place, and indeed Ishchenko's record lasts for less than a day, being broken by workers at the Chelyabinsk Tractor Factory. Moreover the entire nation is represented at Magnitogorsk itself, as the demand for postal services demonstrates:

Шли костромские, степенные, с тонко раздутыми ноздрями, шли казанские татары, шли кавказцы: грузины, чеченцы; шли башкиры, шли немцы, москвичи, питерцы в пиджаках и косоворотках, шли украинцы, евреи, белорусы...

Десятки тысяч кривых лиловых адресов рябили в глазах корявыми своими прописями, ошибками, путаницей районов, областей, сельсоветов, колхозов, городов, почтовых отделений, полустанков, имен, прозвищ, фамилий. (3,192)

The many thousands of workers from all parts of the Soviet Union who form the background to the novel are represented by individual characters in the foreground of the action, and they, too, are of differing nationalities. Margulies is a Jew; Zagirov a Tartar; Ishchenko a Ukrainian; Khanumov's tyubeteika marks him out as an Uzbek.

Similarly, although the major event in the novel is the attempt to beat the Khar'kov record, construction work

is by no means the only activity in Magnitogorsk. Forming the background to the work of the cement layers is a wide picture of life in the town. People prepare and sell meals in the canteen, or else sell books and newspapers from stalls in the hotel or the canteen; nurses help pregnant women in labour; long queues form outside the town's single barber's shop; after work some of the young builders have enough energy to rehearse a play; there is even a menagerie with an elephant. Kataev succeeds in painting a picture of a growing town, still lacking the amenities which a real town demands, but managing to provide the essentials of life, and even something extra, for its inhabitants.

Kataev claimed that the menagerie elephant was the only purely invented detail. (3,425-6) For the rest, he adhered to the truth as much as possible. Yet, although the elephant is a pure invention, it fits into the novel very successfully. Such a strange, powerful creature does not seem at all out of place in Magnitogorsk. When it breaks loose during a storm the elephant serves to increase the impression of the powerful forces of nature ranged against man's attempt to transform his society.

4.4.5 Characters

It has already been noted that one of the principles of construction of Vremya, vpered! is the use of contrast, and almost all of the figures in the novel can be divided into groups of contrasting characters, the more important of which will now be examined.

The Engineers

Appropriately enough in a novel about the construction of a major industrial plant the conflict on which the action rests takes place between two engineers - the audacious and inspiring Margulies on the one hand and the cautious, and ultimately reactionary Nalbandov on the other. As stated above, the struggle between Margulies and Nalbandov is encapsulated in two contradictory slogans which circulate among the populace of Magnitogorsk.

"Строительство не французская борьба".
Еще вчера вечером Налбандов пустил эту мысль по строительству. Ее подхватили. На некоторое время она овладела умами.

Налбандов сдержанно торжествовал.

Но сегодня явилась и полетела по строительству другая мысль: "Темпы в эпоху реконструкции решают все".

Две идеи: "строительство не французская борьба" и "темпы в эпоху реконструкции решают все" - вступили между собой в борьбу, и признани этой начавшейся борьбы преследовали Налбандова всюду.
(3,263)

Superficially, the quarrel between Margulies and Nalbandov is a purely technical one of engineering policy, but in fact the attitudes expressed by the two slogans are shown to have far wider implications for the future path of Soviet society. Behind the question of whether expensive imported machinery should be abused (with the risk that it will wear out prematurely) in order to lay concrete at a previously unheard of pace, lies the much more important question of the reasons behind the rapid industrialisation of the first Five Year Plan period. Kataev's support for Margulies against

Nalbandov is obvious throughout the novel, nowhere more so than in his direct quotation from a speech by Stalin on the need for rapid industrialisation in order to avert a military disaster such as had plagued Russia for centuries.

"Задержать темпы - это значит отстать. А отсталых бьют. Но мы не хотим оказаться битыми. Нет, не хотим! История старой России состояла, между прочим, в том, что ее непрерывно били за отсталость. Били монгольские ханы. Били турецкие беки. Били шведские феодалы. Били польско-литовские паны. Били англо-французские капиталисты. Били японские бароны. Били все - за отсталость. За отсталость военную, за отсталость культурную, за отсталость государственную, за отсталость промышленную, за отсталость сельскохозяйственную. Били потому, что это было доходно и сходило безнаказанно..."

"Вот почему нам нельзя больше отставать."
(3,139 and 423)¹

This speech, from which Kataev quotes at the beginning and at the end of the novel, throws all the weight of official approval behind Margulies's actions. Only industrialisation at break-neck speed can give Russia the strength to repulse a foreign invasion if it should come. Therefore Nalbandov's caution, which at first sight appears justified, places him in the same category as the more blatant saboteurs who play an important part in other Soviet novels of the period.

Margulies is Jewish, but Kataev makes little of his nationality. Like Fadeev's Levinson, on whom he may be partly modelled, Margulies is small in stature, yet commands the respect of his subordinates. Like Levinson his name is the only clue to his nationality until late in the novel when, after the pressing events are over, he has time to reflect on his private life in a conversation with Shura and to recall the death of

1. See note 1, p. 207 for details of Stalin's speech, quoted without a source by Kataev.

of his father in a pogrom. (3,411)¹ (A similar point is made in Fadeev's Razgrom where Levinson's family concerns are pushed to the back of his mind by pressing military tasks.) On the first page of the novel Margulies gives part of his private time, notionally allocated to sleep, to the public matter of the attempt to beat Khar'kov's record.

Часы шли верно. Но Маргулиес не спал. Он встал в шесть и опередил время. Еще не было случая, чтобы будильник действительно поднял его.

Маргулиес не мог доверять такому, в сущности, простому механизму, как часы, такую драгоценную вещь, как время. (3,131)

In addition to denying himself sleep in order to work harder on the construction of the new site Margulies also denies himself food. Time after time during the day he is on the point of eating a meal at the canteen when he is called away urgently, a device which seems to emphasise the passing of time as well as helping in the characterisation of the engineer. The leitmotif by which Kataev makes Margulies instantly recognisable is the bag of boiled sweets with which he allays the pangs of hunger while still working. While others such as the American engineer Bixby have time to eat a meal in peace Margulies dashes from one part of the site to another with only some boiled sweets for food. He has no time even to wash his face in the morning. Thus the first features which Kataev stresses in Margulies's character are

1. Several of the details in Margulies's account of his childhood anticipate similar scenes in Beleet parus odinokii. On Margulies as a Jew see M. Friedberg, 'Jewish Themes in Soviet Russian Literature' in L. Kochan (ed.), The Jews in Soviet Russia since 1917 (London, 1972), pp. 197 and 206.

his immense energy and indefatigability as well as the conviction and enthusiasm which enable him to ignore the normal bodily needs of food and sleep in the pursuit of faster and faster work rates. These same qualities account for the way in which Margulies survives the difficult physical conditions at Magnitogorsk; the wind, heat and dust of summer and, even more terrible, the biting cold of winter during which Margulies had daringly continued with the construction of a dam.

Yet although Margulies supports wholeheartedly the notion of socialist competition and constantly increasing work rates, although he initiates the phrase 'темпы в эпоху реконструкции решают все', his quest for greater and greater speed of construction is by no means reckless. Kataev is at pains to stress that Margulies bases his record attempt on the latest expert technical analysis of concrete, according to which the quality of the concrete will not suffer unduly when it is laid at high speed. Indeed the whole of Chapter twenty nine consists of a report which demonstrates that there is no technical reason why the quality of the concrete should suffer even if the established number of mixes per hour were to be dramatically increased. Margulies waits until he has the evidence of successful experiments carried out in Moscow before launching the assault on the world record. He is not prepared to sacrifice quality to speed by an unsubstantiated guess that the quality will not suffer if speed is increased. That his enthusiasm is held in check by common sense and caution testifies to his genuine idealism; he is no careerist

or opportunist prepared to risk anything for the sake of personal fame. (In this respect he contrasts with the foreman Mosya whose immense efforts, while they undoubtedly contribute to the success of the venture, derive from his thirst for glory.) But while displaying a certain degree of caution Margulies refuses to allow events to take their normal course. If the site is to be completed satisfactorily then time must be outstripped and Margulies's whole life is an example of outstripping time. His habit of rising before the alarm rings has already been mentioned. This is a minor example of an important feature of Margulies's nature which is best seen in his use of the telephone to overcome time. Not content to wait several days for the results of the latest technical analysis to arrive from the Institute in Moscow he telephones his sister in Moscow and asks her to obtain the results and dictate them over the line to Magnitogorsk. The notion of Margulies using human ingenuity and technology to outstrip time is important to Kataev's general thesis in the novel and he takes some care to convey it in a striking manner.

Маргулиес вошел в обитую войлоком будку и крепко запер за собой дверь.

Тотчас его охватила такая полная тишина, будто, заперев дверь, он запер самое время, Время остановилось вокруг него плотной, неподвижной средой.

Но едва он приложил к ушам специальную трубку, вместо остановившегося времени заговорило пространство. (3,195)

As if to underline the importance of this idea, Kataev returns to it several chapters later when describing the second conversation between Margulies and Katya.

Так в это прекрасное летнее утро, в десять по-московски и в двенадцать по тамошнему, на расстоянии нескольких тысяч километров друг от друга разговаривали брат и сестра, и голоса их летели из Европы в Азию и из Азии в Европу, покрывая упрямый гул слишком отстающего времени и слишком неподвижного пространства. (3,251)

But as a character Margulies lacks real interest because he lacks complexity. There is no room in the novel for the leisurely development of character, so the hints of an unhappy past life (the murder of his father and his own first marriage) are left unexplored and they leave no visible mark on the hero's psyche. Kataev replaces complexity by an inoffensive, and indeed endearing, eccentricity, summed up in Margulies's liking for sweets.

When considered in conjunction with Kataev's characters of the 1920s Margulies represents a definite shift away from the type of heroes so forcefully criticised by Mashbits-Verov. Unlike Eduard Tochkin, Petr Sinaiskii, Filipp Stepanovich Prokhorov and Rodion Zhukov, Margulies does not have a passive attitude towards life. None of Kataev's earlier heroes with their optimistic passivity would have been capable of acting as decisively as Margulies, nor of believing in man's ability to shape his own future by overcoming the normal pace of time and changing the face of nature itself instead of wondering at its beauty. These aspects of Margulies's character are new in a Kataevan hero and appear somewhat alien to the author himself, as though he were not accustomed to them. Fortunately, however, Kataev does clearly identify with certain other aspects of Margulies's nature, notably his childlike wonder at the dimensions of the world (a wonder which in no way

prevents him from challenging nature by daring to build first a dam then a huge factory complex). Kataev is nowhere closer to his main hero than at the end of the novel when Margulies says: 'Я, собственно, себя все время чувствую мальчишкой. Семилетним ребенком. Здесь ко мне возвращается детство. Вот я сейчас иду, и смотри, какие громадные вокруг нас вещи, шумы, дымы, огни...'

(3,411) In creating Margulies Kataev has clearly attempted to move away from his previous heroes while preserving some of the features, such as childishness, which he finds attractive.

The other senior engineer, Nalbandov, is in almost all respects the opposite of Margulies, (a contrast which is in keeping with the schematic nature of the novel's construction). Whereas Margulies is infected by genuine enthusiasm for socialist competition, Nalbandov seems to fear it, as if it might endanger his dry, controlled, bureaucratic way of life symbolised by the enormous inkwell on his desk which seems to grow ever larger. 'Чернильница вырастает до невероятных масштабов. Она уже занимает полмира. В ее стеклянной шахте могут летать аэропланы, ходить поезда, расти леса, возвышаться горы.' (3,406)

Like another, though far greater, bureaucrat in Russian literature - Aleksei Karenin - Nalbandov proves to be a more complex character than at first sight appears to be the case. In the early part of the novel his objection to the record attempt seems to be based on a rigid adherence to hitherto accepted norms and a fear that to go beyond those norms would shorten the life of expensive imported machinery. These

arguments are superficially sound, but are undermined by Kataev's device of quoting Stalin's demand for increased tempos. As Margulies says in the important conversation between the two engineers, the country's prime need is to be in a position to build its own machinery as quickly as possible and this can be ensured only by rapid industrialisation. (3,337)

Another reason for Nalbandov's opposition to the record attempt emerges from his relations with the American tourists Ray Roope and Leonard Darlow. While the members of Ishchenko's brigade work at hitherto unimaginable speed and Margulies goes without food or rest, Nalbandov spends the day in a large comfortable car in the company of the two Americans. To Roope and Darlow Nalbandov presents an image of a dedicated Bolshevik engineer determined to overcome the laws of nature by means of technology. At one point he says: 'Законы природы - неизменны, - отрезал Налбандов, - они косны и консервативны. Они заперты сами в себе и не могут выйти из своего заключения. Человеческий гений безграничен.'

(3,267) But, just as he is secretly glad to be accompanying the cultured Americans in a comfortable car instead of working amidst the heat and dust of Magnitogorsk, so does he secretly agree with Roope that man is not strong enough to overcome nature.

Если выдержит ваше бедное земное человеческое сердце, - с религиозным вздохом сказал Мистер Рай Руп, складывая руки на животе и хитро поглядывая на Налбандова.

"Он прав", - подумал Налбандов и сказал:
- Оно выдержит. Будьте уверены. (3,268)

In his heart Nalbandov believes, along with Roope, that a

town cannot grow in a desert in a matter of a few years, for it will lack tradition, history and culture, and despite his brave words Nalbandov sets great store by these things.

At this point Nalbandov's motivation is reasonably complex (when compared to a unidimensional figure like Margulies), but Kataev chooses to add one more motive for his hatred of the record attempt, namely, personal dislike and jealousy of Margulies. Nalbandov may be officious and bureaucratic but he is also intelligent, cultured, and articulate and his plight of having to express views with which he is no longer in sympathy, of having to conceal from himself and others his innermost thoughts, makes him an interesting and not totally unsympathetic character. In order to undermine a possible sympathy which endangers the novel's support for socialist competition Kataev deprives Nalbandov of principles and turns him into a moral bankrupt obsessed with hatred for Margulies, and harbouring a secret desire for personal glory. At the end of the novel Nalbandov composes two official complaints against Margulies - one, that he endangered the quality of the concrete and damaged the machinery by indulging in reckless competition with Khar'kov, and the other, that he would not allow a rate in excess of 400 mixes per shift contrary to the wishes of the Party and the spirit of enthusiasm of the workers. Nalbandov's problem lies in deciding which of the two complaints to forward to his superior. He has no preference; either charge is acceptable so long as Margulies can be reprimanded or removed from office.

Nalbandov holds more interest as a character than his opponent Margulies. As with the American, Ray Roope, Kataev cannot quite conceal his admiration for some of the values which Nalbandov holds dear.

The Women

The two leading women characters in Vremya, vpered! never meet, yet they stand opposed to each other no less markedly than the engineers Margulies and Nalbandov. Indeed, the contrast between them is even more schematic and, as was said above, is used as a constructional device.

Fenya is an unsophisticated girl from a collective farm who, finding herself pregnant, comes to Magnitogorsk to be reunited with the child's father, Ishchenko. After initial misgivings that Ishchenko will reject her she settles immediately into the routine of work at Magnitogorsk and her child is born at the same time as Ishchenko's brigade beat the world record.

Whereas most of Kataev's sympathy lies unintentionally with Nalbandov rather than Margulies, he redresses the balance with the women. All of his warmth goes to Fenya rather than the sophisticated Klava. Several times in the previous decade Kataev had portrayed simple women with considerable affection and understanding.¹ Outstanding among these characters is Polechka from Rebenok whom Fenya resembles in several

1. See, for example, his story Dun'kina zhizn', Kommunarka Ukrainy, 1922, No. 9, pp. 16-23. See also Rebenok, discussed in an earlier chapter.

respects. Both women are shy and unassuming, and both have a touching sense of wonder. The warm, affectionate humour with which Kataev treats Polechka is also evident in the characterisation of the naive Fenya, for instance in her first reactions to the outlandishness of Magnitogorsk.

Феня поставила мешок на рельсы, отдышалась.
Шел сцепщик. Она к нему: - Товарищ, а где тут
город, будьте любезные?

- Тут и город, где же еще? (3,170)

Yet Kataev does not mock Fenya; he evokes genuine sympathy for the plight of the pregnant girl lost in a mass of new buildings, piles of dirt, gravel foundation pits and barbed wire. At the same time he uses Fenya's plight to convey the immense size of Magnitogorsk and the ceaseless activity which makes it so incomprehensible to the newcomer. Fenya had imagined that everyone at Magnitogorsk would know Ishchenko, but she is told that there are several thousand brigade leaders on the site as well as forty five or fifty thousand workers. Eventually, having walked round the site for hours, she finds Ishchenko. Immediately her fatigue disappears and she becomes infected with the desire to work.

А она как ни в чем не бывало. Ее охватило
страстное, нетерпеливое желание как можно
скорее переделать все дела: постирать грязное,
убраться, сходить в кооператив, обменять талоны,
вымыть пол, сварить обед, протереть окно,
обвернуть лампочку абажурчиком, поискать, где
тут вольный рынок, разложить вещи, прибить
полочку. (3,173)

The principal device used by Kataev in the characterisation of Fenya is semi-direct speech ('*nesobstvenno-pryamaya rech'*'), which he has used to great effect throughout his career in portraying unsophisticated adults and, especially, children. The following extract is typical of those chapters involving

Fenya. In addition to semi-direct speech, it is worth noting that the sentences are very brief, and that relative clauses are avoided.

Плечо обмирало, немело. Крепко болела спина.
Шею так схватывало, что головы не повернуть,
и тяжесть пудовая в пояснице.

Ох, скорее бы что-нибудь одно. Или заснуть.
Или найти. Или назад в поезд. Или напиться
холодненькой водички. (3,171)

The birth of Fenya's child takes on an obviously symbolic significance in view of the fact that it happens on the very day when Ishchenko's brigade sets a new world record. The child was conceived in Europe to be born in Asia in a new city which was itself in the process of being built. In Chapter three Kataev, in the guise of a poet and correspondent of Ekonomicheskaya gazeta, reflects on the relationship between Europe and Asia in the new post-revolutionary era.

Мы пересекаем Урал.

Мелькая в окнах слева направо, пролетает,
крутясь, обелиск "Европа - Азия". Он выбелен
и облуплен. Он сплошь покрыт прописями, как
провинциальный адрес. Бессмысленный столб.
Он остался позади. Значит, мы в Азии? Смешно.
Бешеным темпом мы движемся на Восток и несем
с собой революцию. Никогда больше не будем
мы Азией. (3,139)

Fenya and her unborn child are also travelling on that same train from west to east, and whereas Ishchenko, Margulies, Korneev and the others build a new city in order to bring the Revolution to Asia, Fenya gives birth to a son who will be brought up in the new city. Her work is as much part of the building of a new society as is that of the engineers, the brigade leaders or the foremen, and she

labours to give birth at the same time as they labour to build the city and the industrial plant.

To travel from Europe to Asia in order to give birth requires courage, and there are times during the long journey when Fenya's heart quails at the thought of what she has done ('Бог знает, куда она заехала. На край света! И что ее там ждет?') (3,166) but, having arrived at Magnitogorsk, she realises that she is among people of her own kind and all of her fears for the future disappear. Among the women at Magnitogorsk many are pregnant, and despite the heat, wind and dust the new city is a good place to bring up children.

For an unsophisticated woman like Fenya the spirit of optimism and vitality which throbs in Magnitogorsk far outweighs the potential disadvantages of an unpleasant climate and distance from the large cities of European Russia. But for Klava the attractions of European comfort and culture together with her fears for her daughter's health in Magnitogorsk prove too strong to resist, and she leaves Korneev, whom she loves, to return to her husband in Moscow. Chapter sixty eight, describing Klava's train journey from Magnitogorsk across the Urals towards Moscow, parallels Chapter three in which Fenya's journey was described. Taken together, these chapters form an important framework for the novel, and it is significant that they contain the lengthy quotation from Stalin's speech of 4 February 1931, the style of which Kataev claimed to have imitated.¹ Moreover, the tone of the two

1. See 'Raport semnadtsatomu', p. 105. 'Между прочим, стиль Сталина, точный, ясный, ритмически необычайно богатый, дал мне основную синтаксическую установку.'

chapters is elevated, with lyrical reflections from the author himself who here uses the first person. Thus the chapters play an important part in the realisation of Kataev's artistic intentions, and the contrast between the two women contributes to this.

In some respects Klava is the female counterpart of Nalbandov, for like him she has no faith in man's ability to overcome nature and create a city and industrial plant in the middle of an inhospitable landscape. For Klava, as for Nalbandov and the Americans Roope and Darlow, a city must have the trappings bestowed by time and culture. She cannot share in the enthusiasm which Margulies, Ishchenko and others like them bring to the task of building, and so cannot see past the present discomfort. She leaves Korneev reluctantly, but Kataev makes it clear that she has no choice, for she has failed to accept the concept of time which life in Magnitogorsk requires. Whereas Korneev can find no time to whiten his shoes (the motif by which he is recognised) or spare a moment during the shift to see Klava, she has nothing to do in Magnitogorsk and time hangs heavily on her hands. Accustomed to the old pace of life, she cannot adjust to the new 'struggle for increased tempos' and so she must lose Korneev. Her role in the novel is a minor one, in terms of space devoted to her, yet it is a vital one, for her failure to adapt to Magnitogorsk underlines the theme inherent in Kataev's title - Vremya, vpered! - Time, Forward!. The author's thesis is that in the new era of socialist construction only those able to quicken their pulse rate and immerse themselves enthusiastically in

work will be able to achieve the type of fulfilment in all areas of life, both private and public, experienced in the novel by Margulies, Shura Soldatova, Ishchenko and Fenya.

The Americans

Throughout the 1920s, and particularly towards the end of the decade, when the Soviet Union launched the first Five Year Plan, America exerted a powerful force on the imagination of Russian artists. They were attracted by the unparalleled technological achievements of the United States, and at the same time struck by the great contrast which existed between the personal lives of their fellow countrymen and Americans. Mayakovskii's poetry contains examples of both attitudes towards America: 'Bruklinskii most' and 'Vyzov'.¹ Gor'kii, Pil'nyak, and Il'f and Petrov are but a few of the more famous authors who wrote about America at this time.²

Kataev shared his fellow authors' interest in the United States, particularly in its technological and financial success. In Zimoi, his story of 1923, he describes the aspiration for wealth as a desire to become an American.³ Later, Kataev's acquaintance with the vast industrial sites of Dneprostroi and Magnitogorsk drew from him the exclamation:

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1. V. Mayakovskii, 'Bruklinskii most', Sobranie sochinenii, vol. 7, pp. 83-7; 'Vyzov', pp. 73-5.
 2. See Gork'ii's Gorod zheltogo d'yavola; Pil'nyak's O'kei; Il'f and Petrov's Oдноэтажная Америка.
 3. Ivan Ivanovich, the brother of the girl with whom the hero is in love, dreams of wealth such as Americans have: 'То-то. Доллар - это, батенька, все. Я преклоняюсь перед долларом. Я влюблен в доллар. Пять долларов - один фунт стерлингов. Вот. Это единица измерения человеческого права на существование. Вы знаете, как живут люди в Америке? Отель. Миллион этажей. Номера. В каждом номере - три крана. В одном - кипяток, в другом - вода ледяная, в третьем - комнатная.' (1,290) Kataev here satirises Ivan Ivanovich, but to a considerable extent he shares his character's admiration for the Americans. The autobiographical hero resolves to become rich like an American.

'Слово было найдено. Детройт! Индустриальный пейзаж. Так вот как она будет выглядеть, наша "избяная, кондовая, толстозадая" когда через несколько пятилеток покроется сетью таких "детройтов"!'¹

Of the three Americans in Vremya, vpered! one, Leonard Darlow, is a very minor character, but the other two, the rich tourist Ray Roope and the engineer Thomas Bixby, play important parts in the novel, representing different aspects of Kataev's view of America. Roope is ostensibly a negative character, and Kataev attempts to portray him satirically by emphasising the utterly complacent self-satisfaction which lies behind the cultured facade of mildness and reasonableness. Opposed as he is to the Soviet Union, Roope is sufficiently motivated by greed to invest money in its development, for he cannot fail to recognise its potential. While he professes to despise modern technological society, which, he claims, has not increased man's happiness one iota, he wallows in the comfort of a modern automobile and invests money in a country which is on the threshold of unprecedented industrial growth. His own hypocrisy gives the lie to his sentimental view of the happiness of man in a pre-industrial heaven. Yet, for all the absurdity of his position, Roope clearly interests Kataev, and embodies several features which had earlier formed part of the author's own outlook. In reply to Nalbandov's speech about the magnificent achievement of building the dam

1. 'Porogi' (8,225).

Roope says:

Но для чего все это человеку? Вода для промышленности. Прекрасно. Но для чего промышленность? Для производства вещей. Прекрасно. Но для чего вещи? Разве они нужны для счастья? Молодость и здоровье - единственное, что нужно для счастья.
(3,289)

A decade earlier several of Kataev's heroes had expressed similar views, most notably in Zheleznoe kol'tso. The final scene in which Roope appears brings to mind the atmosphere of such stories as Opyt Krantsa and V osazhdennom gorode. Working on his book late at night Roope allows his imagination to create a city which recalls the Odessa of Kataev's youth:

Это был воображаемый портовый город. Это были - бары, дансинги, кафе, трубы пароходов, скрежет погрузки, перестук буферов на высоких эстакадах, светящиеся башни ратуши.

Разноцветные огни горели в стаканах, воспламеняя жажду.

Светофоры висели над перекрестками. Они висели, как ящики фокусников, как маленькие трехъярусные китайские пагоды.

Разноцветные шарики прыгали из отделения в отделение, волшебным образом меняя цвета. Желтый превращался в зеленый, зеленый в красный.

Шумела роскошно озаренная толпа, неслась слабая музыка. Отдаленно звучал весь этот мощный симфонический оркестр огней, запахов, движения, страстей. (3,413)

The synaesthetic description of the vibrant, decadent city might well have been written by Kataev ten years earlier. But within Vremya, vpered! such a description must be attributed to a negative character. Like Bunin's gentleman from San Francisco, the rich business man Roope finds that in the face of inevitable death his life has been meaningless because it has lacked any lasting purpose. 'Ему стало страшно. Он всегда теперь испытывал по ночам страх. Это было сознание

неизбежной, а главных - близкой смерти. Ну - десять, пятнадцать лет...Ну семнадцать! А потом!...' (3,413)

In the figure of Ray Roope Kataev introduces into the novel a distorted version of the typical hero of his early short stories. He shares with them love of wealth, an interest in culture, and above all an attitude of detachment from the great events of the age. But whereas they were portrayed sympathetically by Kataev, Roope is intended to be unsympathetic. Even more than Margulies, Roope demonstrates the change of direction undertaken in Vremya, vpered!.

The other American, Bixby, is an engineer who has come to the Soviet Union to earn enough money to secure his future. In contrast to Roope he is an honest, hard-working man, whose life is blighted by the materialism of American society. When the bank in which he has placed his money crashes he has no other pillar on which to lean and his life ceases to have any meaning.

Although he is a minor character whose story serves to delay the novel rather than contribute to its central action, Bixby is more fully realised than most of the characters because Kataev sympathises with him and understands his craving for wealth. As in the case of Roope, a feature which recurs several times in Kataev's stories of the 1920s is here embodied in an American. Kataev's satirical view of Bixby is tempered by a liking for him and, indeed, his attitude recalls the gentle self-mockery with which he approached such

autobiographical characters as Petr Sinaiskii.

Bixby shares with Roope a solipsism which contrasts with the neglect of self shown by Margulies. Unlike the Jewish engineer, Bixby always has time to eat well and at the end of the working day to settle down comfortably with some magazines. Above all, his self-satisfaction shows in the pleasure which he derives from reading the glossy American magazines full of advertisements for things which he dreams of owning.

Фома Егорович отошел в сторонку, сел на доски и вытащил из кармана журнал. Он медленно развернул толстую, тяжелую, свернутую в трубку тетрадь глянцевого меловой бумаги и разложил ее на коленях...

Со сладостной медлительностью, страница за страницей, он погружался в роскошный мир идеальных вещей, материй и продуктов...

Фома Егорович с наслаждением всматривался в предметы, любовался ими, снисходительно критиковал. (3, 375)

As in the short story Veshchi, Kataev here simultaneously condemns the love of material wealth and reveals his own fascination for the things which money can buy. In the figure of Bixby Kataev continues his habit of looking into his own personality and ruefully criticising certain aspects of it. The death of Bixby in the hotel fire is a moment of genuine pathos achieved through the author's identification with the character, and it ranks with the humiliation of the unfortunate gambler Zagirov (with whom Kataev also identifies) as one of the most memorable scenes in the novel.

The Gamblers

The Americans Roope and Bixby serve to delay the central action of the novel. A similar role is played by the two members of Ishchenko's brigade who spend almost all of their time gambling; Saenko, the ruthless winner and Zagirov, the abject loser. The theme of gambling, like that of money and possessions in general, has exerted a powerful influence on Kataev's work at all stages of his career. Among his early works Opyt Krantsa, Zimoi and Rastratchiki all touch on the theme of gambling, but the exploration of the terrifying gambling compulsion which can leave one person the slave of another really begins with Vremya, vpered!, is continued in the story Ushki (1930) and in Beleet parus odinokii and recurs sporadically later in Kataev's work.

Zagirov loses all his money to Saenko and is seized by a feverish desire to win it back which merely leads him to further losses, until all of his possessions also belong to the pitiless Ukrainian. Then his despair and misery turn to indifference and he ceases to feel anything.

Все было кончено.

Загиров уже не плакал, не просил, ничего не говорил. Он молча ходил перед своим господином, голодный, сжигаемый страшной жаждой, опустошенный...
(3,318)

The regeneration of Zagirov through the vestiges of his feeling for the brigade and his return to the site in time to help in the final stages of the record-breaking shift are described effectively enough by Kataev, but compared with the gripping gambling fever and the chilling indifference which succeeds

Zagirov's total loss they appear sentimental and forced because they are not felt by the author in the way that the earlier gambling scenes are felt.

Zagirov's tormentor Saenko also ranks as one of the more interesting characters in the novel. His sadistic treatment of the wretched Tartar at first appears to be without motivation but towards the end of the novel it emerges that his father has been arrested as a kulak and a bitter resentment against the new order has been gnawing at Saenko's heart. His extreme malevolence combined with the effects of the vodka make his behaviour irrational, and he thus continues the line of characters whose perception of the world is altered by an unusual mental condition (a line which stretches back to the beginning of the 1920s).

The Brigade Leaders

The three brigade leaders - Ermakov, Khanumov and Ishchenko - are scarcely distinguishable one from the other, although by virtue of his brigade's central place in the novel Ishchenko's portrait is somewhat fuller than that of the others. The main characteristic of all three (and, to an even greater extent of the foreman Mosya) is an extreme form of competitiveness stemming from a self-esteem which is almost morbid. Kataev's sketch "To, chto ya videl" had been criticised by some of the workers at the factory concerned for its portrayal of socialist competition in sporting terms, and a similar criticism could be made of the author's treatment

of the brigade leaders in Vremya, vpered!. Indeed both Gladkov and Shaginyan drew attention to the unhealthy aspect of socialist competition as seen by Kataev in their highly critical appraisals of his novel.¹ There is something childish about the self-esteem of the brigade leaders and of Mosya, and whereas this characteristic is appropriate in Petya Bachei and Gavrik Chernoiivanenko, the young heroes of Beleet parus odinokii, it is embarrassingly inappropriate for men such as Ishchenko and Khanumov (as, incidentally, for the adult Bachei and Chernoiivanenko in Za vlast' Sovetov). Their pride takes the form of a childish sulkiness, as in the scene where Ishchenko is talking to the newspaper correspondent Slobodkin:

- Вот что тебе скажу, друг мой Ищенко. Только ты не волнуйся, не волнуйся. На Челябине натолкнулись мы на такой факт. Приходит к нам в вагон тоже такой вот, как ты, бригадир. Бетонщик тоже. И заявляет...

Ищенко, не слушая, упрямо смотрел в пол.

- А я тебе, Сlobодкин, говорю одно. Не будет того, чтоб ваш Ханумов всю жизнь над нами смеялся. Не будет того. (3,271)

The mutual jealousy between the brigade leaders can be explained to some extent by the activities of Shura Soldatova and her two helpers who produce posters depicting Ishchenko, Khanumov and Ermakov on various modes of transport, supposedly reflecting the level of the brigade's output. Thus, after a particularly unproductive shift Khanumov is portrayed astride a tortoise.

Kataev's view that the underlying motivation which ensures the success of socialist competition is the desire

1. F. Gladkov, 'Moya rabota nad Energiei' in Energiya (M., 1934) pp. 21-22. M. Shaginyan, 'Kak ya rabotala nad Gidrotsentral'yu in Gidrotsentral' (M., 1933), pp. 15-16.

for personal glory can be seen nowhere more clearly than in the figure of the foreman Mosya, whose quest for personal fame reaches morbid levels. After his first day at Magnitogorsk he realises that at last he has found a place where his need for fame can be satisfied.

Он стоял, очарованный, как бродяга перед витриной ювелирного магазина в незнакомом городе, ночью. Огни дышали, испарились; сверкали и текли, как слава. Слава лежала на земле, нужно было только протянуть руку. Мося протянул руку. (3,161)

In several respects Mosya anticipates Chernoiivanenko from the first version of Za vlast' Sovetov. Both characters act more like children than adults, speak in a tearful, high-pitched voice and have a morbid self-esteem.

Apart from Mosya, the brigade leaders are of little interest as characters. Ishchenko recalls Rodion Zhukov but adds nothing new to Kataev's portrait gallery. Ermakov and Khanumov are minor figures drawn with a few hasty lines. A little more substantial is Korneev, the works manager, who can find no time during the day to return home for a few minutes in order to try to dissuade Klava from leaving him. Like Margulies, he subordinates his private life to his work.

Aware, no doubt, that he must give the reader some detail by which such characters may be fixed in the mind, the author assigns to each of them a motif by which they can be instantly recognised, for all their lack of depth. Thus Korneev's white shoes are constantly being soiled by the mud on the site; Ishchenko never wears shoes; Khanumov wears an Uzbek tyubeteika. The author's own method where these

characters are concerned resembles that of Shura Soldatova and her helpers who portray the brigade leaders on their posters by means of instantly identifiable details.

Бригадиры были настолько непохожи на себя, насколько портрет может быть не похож на оригинал. Однако у Ханумова была пестрая тибетейка, у Ермакова-яркий галстук, а у Ищенко - явно босые ноги. И это делало сходство неопровержимым, как хороший эпитет. (3,152)

The Writers

Among the many people from different backgrounds and of different nationalities whom Kataev met in Magnitogorsk and on whom he drew for his fund of characters, those with whom he most closely identified were undoubtedly the authors and journalists reporting on the progress at the site for scores of newspapers up and down the land. The novel bears a dedication to one such journalist, Aleksandr Smolyan of ROSTA, and when Kataev himself enters the novel in the transposed first chapter it is to write to Smolyan from Paris a letter in which he acknowledges his debt to the journalist.

'Первая глава, по праву, принадлежит вам, мой дорогой друг и руководитель. В капле дождя вы научили меня видеть сад.'

(3,425) Kataev took every opportunity to praise the work of Smolyan and others like him, and in an interview published in Literaturnaya gazeta in 1932 he said:

Должен сказать, что я там увидел действительно новые типы журналистов: корреспондента РОСТА т. Смольяна и корреспондента "Комсомольской правды" т. Нариньяни, которые проводят очень большую работу, участвуя во всех областях жизни Магнитостроя.¹

1. 'Pisateli na Magnitostroye. Beseda s A. Malyshkinym i V. Kataevym', Literaturnaya gazeta, 11 March 1932.

Smolyan is probably represented in the novel by the journalists Vinkich and Triger, while Kataev draws partly on his own experience for the important figure of Georgii Vasil'evich, whose initial reaction to Magnitogorsk (one of almost total confusion) and attempts to find a key which would explain the bewildering mass of objects and people, the constant but apparently purposeless movement all around him, parallel Kataev's own feelings about the new city and help to explain the construction of the novel and some of its stylistic peculiarities.

Georgii Vasil'evich closely resembles the hero of Chtenie p'esy, a short story written by Kataev at the same time as Vremya, vpered! and, for that reason, subtitled rasskaz na polyax romana.¹ Babadzhan, a young playwright, reads his latest play to the editorial committee of a theatre and finds it a depressing and humiliating experience (in this respect he recalls the unnamed hero of Avtor, written two years earlier). (2,197-209) On leaving the theatre he finds himself in the unrecognisable world of a Moscow undergoing massive reconstruction.

Множество предметов окружало Бабаджана. Между ними не было связи, как в ребусе. Окно, Дом, Дирижабль. Папоротник. Молоток. Поезд. Девушка. Молния. Зеркало. Глаза. Ночерга... По улицам стало невозможно ходить. Извозчики. Пешеходы. Ломовики. Автомобили. Автобусы. Трамваи. У всех разная скорость: можно сойти с ума. Мы живем в эпоху разных скоростей. Скорости должны быть уравнены. В разных ритмах невозможно жить. Ритм должен быть один.²

1. Chtenie p'esy, Ogonek, 1931, No. 24, pp. 4-5.

2. Chtenie p'esy, p. 5. Compare Georgii Vasil'evich's reflections in Chapter nineteen of Vremya, vpered!, particularly pp. 206-7.

Chapter nineteen of Vremya, vpered! consists largely of random notes by Georgii Vasil'evich recording the many and varied impressions he has gained during his first few hours on the construction site.

Мир в моем окне открывается, как ребус. Я вижу множество фигур. Люди, лошади, плетенки, провода, машины, пар, буквы, облака, горы, вагоны, вода... Но я не понимаю их взаимной связи. А эта взаимная связь есть. Есть какая-то могущественная взаимодействующая. Это совершенно несомненно. Я это знаю, я в это верю, но я этого не вижу. И это мучительно. Верить и не видеть! Я ломаю себе голову, но не могу прочесть ребуса... (3,206)

Georgii Vasil'evich's problem is how to connect the many objects and activities by which he is surrounded. When viewed from afar, the general panorama of the construction site yields nothing but a meaningless inventory of objects and people.¹ Georgii Vasil'evich tries to overcome this difficulty by scanning the site through binoculars. His field of vision narrows and objects grow fabulously in front of his eyes. The general gives way to the particular, but Georgii Vasil'evich still has not found the key to his rebus. In order to transform the series of visual impressions into words (i.e. solve the rebus) he has to find the overall meaning of the activity which he sees around him. Looking through his binoculars he is able to pick out people whom the reader recognises as Ishchenko, Fenya, Saenko, Zagirov, and Seroshevskii, but who they are and what relation they bear to the building of Magnitogorsk remains a mystery to Georgii Vasil'evich. The

1. It is worth noting in passing that the view from Georgii Vasil'evich's hotel bedroom is described in a cinematic manner: 'Маленькие человеческие фигурки - чем дальше, тем крошечней, - очень редко разбросанные среди огромного ландшафта, казались вместе со своими малюсенькими тенями совершенно неподвижными, как на моментальной фотографии.' (3,214)

binoculars break up the vast undifferentiated panorama into particular scenes (hence the appropriateness of the term 'rebus') but they alone cannot provide the key.

Significantly, Georgii Vasil'evich turns away from the incomprehensible scene with the phrase creeping empiricism (polzuchii empirizm) on his lips. (3,219) Without a moral or ideological point of view the description of Magnitogorsk would be mere empiricism, but when viewed through an ideological prism it begins to make sense. Many years later, in Trava zabven'ya, Kataev was to describe in some detail his own feelings about Magnitogorsk and to ascribe to Mayakovskii a role in forming his (Kataev's) viewpoint. Bunin, on the other hand, is described in the same section of Trava zabven'ya as being unable to cope with the 'thousand headed hydra' of empiricism:

Он писал все, что хотел, не сдерживаемый никакими моральными обязательствами, даже иногда простыми приличиями. Как изобразитель, он рос и к концу своей жизни достиг высшей степени пластического совершенства. Но отсутствие морального давления извне привело к тому, что Бунин-художник перестал выбирать точки приложения своих способностей, своих душевных сил. Он не мог справиться с "тысячеглавой гидрой эмпиризма", о которой говорил Гёте, и она поглотила его. (9,433)

To judge from Trava zabven'ya, the weapon which enables a writer to cope with 'empiricism' is 'external moral pressure', which, Kataev implies, he, unlike Bunin, felt. In Vremya, vpered! Georgii Vasil'evich is also tortured by 'empiricism'. Without a moral or ideological view of events at Magnitogorsk there is simply too much to describe and the result is meaningless pictures. Fortunately for Georgii Vasil'evich,

help is forthcoming from the journalists Vinkich and Triger. Vinkich familiarises the author with many of the aspects of life in Magnitogorsk, helping him to distinguish one object and one type of worker from another.

Уже строительство не было для него вообще строительством с большой буквы. Уже люди не были для него вообще людьми, степь вообще - степью, горы вообще горами, машины вообще машинами.

Вещи и люди приобретали ощутимую взаимную связь. Они перестали быть безыменными и немymi. Винкич щедро наделял их именами и характеристиками.

И, получив имя, вещь или человек вдруг начинали говорить, осмысленно действовать, сознательно существовать в мире, потерявшем в глазах Георгия Васильевича раздражающую прелесть ребуса. (3,257)

The lesson learned from Triger is that which Kataev himself learned from Smolyan - the ability to see a garden in a raindrop. This important phrase expresses Kataev's view that owing to the indissoluble connections between one sphere of activity and another in the era of socialist competition it is possible to understand and convey the spirit of the entire country by concentrating on one fairly small aspect. The entire picture is beyond any one man's power to encompass, but there is no need even to attempt such a view, for a more limited one will have the same result. Triger develops his own theory of socialist competition, namely, that it is possible to raise the work rate of the entire nation by raising the rate in any one part of the system.

А так как все механизмы Советского Союза в той или иной степени связаны друг с другом и представляют собой сложную взаимодействующую систему, то повышение темпа в какой-нибудь одной точке этой системы неизбежно влечет за собой хоть и маленькое, но безусловное повышение темпа всей системы в целом, то есть в известной мере приближает время социализма. (3,274)

Georgii Vasil'evich's confusion is gradually dispelled, and towards the end of the novel he and Vinkich are actually able to help Ishchenko's brigade in a practical way, but before he learns from Vinkich and Triger his lack of knowledge and his uncertainty are gently mocked by Kataev in the typical fashion for his semi-autobiographical characters. In the chapter in which Vinkich tries to enlist Georgii Vasil'evich's help in support of the attempt on the record the famous author swings from one extreme view to another as first one side of the argument then the other is put to him. But Kataev never allows his mockery of Georgii Vasil'evich to become anything other than affectionate and good-natured, with the result that the latter's confusion and his lack of knowledge of Magnitogorsk endear him to the reader.

4.4.6 Style

Syntax

In his report to the Seventeenth Congress of the CPSU Kataev claimed that the style of Vremya, vpered! owed much to Stalin's style.¹ He then goes on to quote the extract from a Stalin speech which is twice included in the novel. The speech does, indeed, provide a model for some of the stylistic features of Vremya, vpered!. It may, however, be nearer the truth to say that Kataev responded to Stalin's style because it resembled his own rather than to claim any

1. See note 1, p. 229.

great influence. Stalin's short vigorous phrases with their frequent repetition of key words and the total avoidance of linking devices such as conjunctions and relative pronouns is certainly imitated by Kataev in Vremya, vpered!, but earlier works such as Zimoi, written several years before Stalin's speech, also exhibit this feature. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that the rhythm of the Stalin speech is similar to that of the author's own narrative at many points in the novel. An example is the description of the many different nationalities who come to the post-office (quoted above, p. 215). Another example which shows the avoidance of relative clauses is the following: 'Время сжато. Оно летит. Оно стесняет. Из него надо вырваться, выпрыгнуть. Его надо опередить.' (3,188) A more complex instance of the same stylistic feature is found in the following description of the sun:

Белое сильное солнце горело в окне со скоростью ленточного магния. Но, проникнув в коридор, оно сразу лишалось главных союзников - пыли и ветра. Оно теряло свою дику степную ярость. Обезвреженное стеклом, оно стало во всю длину ксилолитового пола, выкрашенного охрой. Оно прикидывалось ручным и добрым, как кошка. (3,134)

Rhythmic prose, relying heavily on repetition and the avoidance of relative and participial clauses gives way frequently to long lists of objects with no syntactic link whatsoever. 'На восток идут облака, элеваторы, заборы, мордовские сарафаны, водоначки, катерпиллеры, эшелоны, церкви, минареты.' (3,137)¹ The frequency of the listing device

1. An American critic has drawn attention to the fact that near the beginning of the novel such lists involve nouns in the singular, i.e. specific objects, whereas later the lists consist predominantly of plural nouns. He sees this as evidence of the shunning of particulars in favour of abstraction which was taking place in Soviet literature at this time. See R.A. Maguire, 'Literary Conflicts in the 1920s', Survey, 1972, No. 1, pp. 124-7. Maguire's thesis is an interesting one, but is not entirely substantiated by the text of Vremya, vpered!.

suggests its importance in Kataev's eyes. It is a device used to achieve several effects in the novel. Firstly, the listing of very different objects suggests the scale and variety of achievement at Magnitogorsk. Secondly, the listing device forms a part of the cinematic technique which has already been discussed; it is the equivalent in a different medium of the roving camera, picking out various objects, apparently at random, but in fact composing a picture and creating an atmosphere. Thirdly, the reduction of normal syntax to lists is suggestive of the mass of impressions crowding in on the writer and forcing him to adjust the normal pace of his writing. The contents of the writer's notebook become a part of the finished work in an age of increased tempos.

A very similar impression is created by the many descriptions of a landscape in constant motion.

Все тронулось с места, все пошло.
Шли деревья. Роща переходила врод разлившуюся реку...
Телеграфный столб плывет тоненькой веточкой ландыша.
(3,137-8)¹

Or again:

Буран шагает по объектам, как великан в семимильных своих сапогах.

Буран рушится на шестой участок.

Шатаются, трясутся опалубки и стальные конструкции. Шатаются, трясутся решетчатые мачты бетонолитных башен, краны, мосты, перекрытия. (3,356)

The immense scale of this constantly fluid landscape deceives the eye by rendering huge objects tiny.

1. The two extracts quoted are quite widely separated, but essentially form part of the same description and are combined here.

У подошвы средней в степи что-то стоит. Вроде небольшого кубика. Подъехали ближе - уже это не кубик, а цинковый ящик, поставленный торчком. В таких ящиках на фронте патроны возили.

Однако степь сильно обманывает глаза. Сразу не понять - большая вещь стоит в степи или маленькая.

Подъехали еще ближе - этот цинковый ящик вдруг четверть степи закрыл и полнеба. В вагоне темно стало. Громаднейший элеватор этажей в восемь. Люди под ним ходят совсем крошечные. (3,168)

There are many other examples in the novel (especially in Chapter five) of Kataev's interest in the relativity of size. He is, of course, by no means the only Soviet author to deal with the subject at this time. The names of Olesha and Kaverin spring immediately to mind as examples of authors fascinated by geometrical relationships and the relativity of dimensions. Indeed, the image, used by Kataev in Chapter five, of looking through the wrong end of binoculars is an obvious reference to Olesha.

The concern with changing impressions of size may be part of the general interest being shown in the USSR at this time in the theories of Einstein which were extensively and passionately discussed in the non-scientific press and which, of course, are more clearly reflected in Kataev's observations on the nature of time in Vremya, vpered!.

Another stylistic device much used in the novel, no less appropriately in the light of the theme of man outstripping time, is that of describing the outcome of an action or situation before mentioning the situation itself, with the result that the reader is left puzzled for a while, and the situation, deprived of context, is 'made strange'. For example, Chapter

six begins with a bewildering, surrealistic description of a tortoise, an old jaded horse, and a bicycle and only later in the chapter do we become aware that these are painted on posters and intended to represent the current achievements of the three brigade leaders and to encourage them to greater efforts. Similarly, Chapter sixty seven begins with Foma Egorovich's illness and delirium (yet again one is reminded of Kataev's liking for the portrayal of delirium) and only later in the chapter does it emerge that he has taken an overdose of morphine.

Kataev frequently uses this device, introducing it on the first page of the novel:

Триста шесть разделить на восемь. Затем
шестьдесят разделить на тридцать восемь и
две десятых.

Это Маргулиес сосчитал в уме мгновенно.

Получается - один и приблизительно пять
десятых.

Числа имели следующее значение: Триста
шесть - количество замесов. Восемь -
количество рабочих часов. Шестьдесят -
количество минут в часе. (3,131)

It is undoubtedly tempting to relate the inversion of event and result to the general theme of Vremya, vpered!, but it must also be remembered that in several stories of the 1920s Kataev used a very similar device to convey illness, drunkenness or great stress, so that his use of the device in his novel of socialist competition is an example of his adapting an existing feature of his work to fit the new demands made on him.

Intonation

The term intonation is used here to refer to the emotional content of the narrative, conveyed largely by choice of vocabulary and syntax. In his works of the 1920s Kataev had made use of a variety of intonations including tender lyricism (Otets, Zimoi), gentle, warm humour (Rebenok), mild satire (scores of short sketches, Rastratchiki), rhetoric (Priklyucheniya paravoza). However, largely because of his preference for the shorter genres of sketch and short story, the range of intonations within any one work remained limited throughout the decade. Even in Rastratchiki he employs a limited range of intonation (the use of rhetoric at the end seems to be an intrusion into the stylised world of the novel). Vremya, vpered! marks Kataev's first successful attempt to integrate several intonations, which in turn must be seen as a result of his attempt to integrate aspects of his previous work with a new attitude of active commitment.

The lyricism which had spread from Kataev's early Buninesque poetry to much of his prose of the 1920s echoes throughout his construction novel.

Дорога ландышей и соловьев. Соловьи не боятся поезда. Они звучат всю ночь. Терпкое, стеклянное шелканье булькает в глиняном горлышке ночи. Ночь до краев наполнена ледяной росой. (3,138)

Or again:

Тучи синей вороненой стали лежали в горах, как огнестрельное оружие.

Поезд бежал в сверкающем огненном дожде, в ярких папоротниках, в радуге, в свежести, в озоне. (3,423)

At several points in the novel Kataev adopts a conversational intonation, both for semi-direct speech and, occasionally,

in his own narrative, as in the description of Mosya. 'Мося из себя такой: лицо - скуластый глиняный кувшин; щегольская батумская кепка; гончарные уши; прекрасный, приплюснутый нос индейского профиля, глаза быстрые, неистовые, воровские.'

(3,147. My italics)

In his portrayal of Ray Roope Kataev uses a more mordant form of the sarcastic intonation met in Zolotoe pero and Veshchi. The American's smugness and love of comfort oozes through his patronising veneer of interest in Magnitogorsk:

Мистер Рай Руп благодушно кивает головой, жмурится. Сцепив на животе небольшие пухлые ручки, он поглядывает то на переводчика, то на Серошевского.

Потом он легким движением головы останавливает мистера Леонарда Дарлея на полуслове и просит нечто перевести. При этом он лукаво посмеивается.

(3,202)

Nalbandov, too, brings a sarcastic intonation from Kataev, as the senior engineer's veils of hypocritical motivation fall away to reveal a vulgar careerist:

Он лихорадочно, напряженно думает.

Нет, первое обвинение все же кажется ему надежнее. Наука есть наука. На нее всегда можно положиться. Хорошая, старая, академическая наука.

Наконец, официальный паспорт фирмы. Иностранцы не ошибаются. Не могут ошибиться.

(3,407)

Finally, Kataev introduces into his novel an elevated intonation like that used by Stalin in the quoted speech; it is used to convey patriotism and the spirit of socialist competition.

Пусть ни одна мелочь, ни одна даже самая крошечная подробность наших неповторимых, героических дней первой пятилетки не будет забыта.

И разве бетономешалка системы Егера, на которой ударные бригады пролетарской молодежи

ставили мировые рекорды, менее достойна сохраниться в памяти потомков, чем ржавый плуг гильотины, который видел я в одном из сумрачных назематов Консьержери? (3,428)

Thus, in the intonational variety of the novel, represented here by a few examples only, is reflected what is perhaps the outstanding feature of Vremya, vpered!, namely, Kataev's attempt to adapt his talent to new demands by combining his known strengths with a new ideological stance.

Imagery

In the use of imagery as in certain aspects of characterisation, Vremya, vpered! continues the pattern established by Kataev in the previous decade. In its rich exotic flavour the imagery of Vremya, vpered! equals, if it does not surpass, most of the author's earlier output (and, indeed, this aspect of the work troubled a majority of the reviewers).

Many of the novel's similes and metaphors could be the creation of a futurist poet, and here the influence of Mayakovskii may possibly be felt as deeply as in the original impulse for the novel. For example:

Поезд выходит из дула туннеля, как шомпол. (3,139)

Будильник затарахтел, как жестянка с монпасье. (3,131)

Под оптическими стеклами очков близорукие глаза Маргулиеса блестели и шевелились, как две длинные мохнатые гусеницы. (3,156)

Воздух ломался мягко, как грифельная доска. (3,132)

If there is one recurring feature of the imagery then it must be the comparison of the building site to a battle front, grotesquely scarred by the trenches of foundation-pits, with the workers as

front line soldiers and time and nature as the enemies.¹

Механизм бетономешалки внешне напоминает
осадное оружие. Гаубицу. Мортиру. Он стоит
на очень маленьких литых колесах.

Поворачивающийся барабан - орудийный
короткий ствол.

Ковш - лоток с бомбами.

Направляющие рельсы, по которым поднимается
ковш - правило!

Вся машина выкрашена в защитный зеленый,
военный цвет. (3,294)

Ishchenko's cry po tachkam! signals the start of a battle no less than did the stirring po konyam! of a brigade commander during the Civil War. When the record comes within the reach of Ishchenko's brigade the battle reaches its peak, - and the storm adds its force to that of time:

Ветер вырывает из тачек столбы цемента и
песка. Щебенка летит из тачек осколками
разорвавшейся бомбы.

Это фронт, это взрывы. Это грохот штурма
и дым газовой атаки. (3,358)

One of the characteristics of the imagery of Vremya, vpered! is that the original image is frequently extended, in an almost Gogolian way, to the point where the comparison is forgotten and the object introduced by the comparison achieves a density of detail which draws attention to it in its own right.²

1. The comparison between the Civil War and the rapid industrialisation of the first Five Year Plan period is a common one in literature of these years. In this connection it is worth noting that Margulies, at the front, seeks aid from the rear (Moscow) before attempting to break the record. He does not act purely on his own initiative. A similar situation was to arise some years later in the second version of Za vlast' Sovetov, where Chernoivanenko relies on Party directives reaching him from the rear.
2. Shklovskii approved of certain images such as the wind and the train which served the author's main purpose, but he objected to certain other images which, he felt, dispersed the reader's attention. 'Syuzhet i obraz', Literaturnaya gazeta, 17 August 1932.

Деревья брели, как новобранцы, оставшие от армии.

Потом деревья стали идти рассыпанной цепью взводов, рот.

Потом с песнями и свистом соловьев показались полки и дивизии.

Нудлатые армии победителей переходили горы. Они возвращались домой, покрытые семицветной славой радуги. (3,422-3)

Shklovskii's objection that such images draw attention to themselves rather than serving the novel's overall purpose may be countered by the argument that the many extended comparisons, full of concrete details, provide a variegated background of differing textures and hues against which the sharply monochromatic foreground is thrown into relief. Without the rich imagery Vremya, vpered! would lack the colour and fluidity which distinguish it from most novels of the period. As with much of his earlier work, Kataev here complements his somewhat superficial, if ingenious, plot and characterisation by a rich poetic vein which adds density to the novel. Lack of depth in Vremya, vpered! is compensated for by the poetic language and the evocation of the buoyant atmosphere of the period.

The abundance of concrete details in comparisons and descriptive passages reminds us that Kataev was a pupil of Bunin, recalls his own early work in both verse and prose, and anticipates one of the most important features of his work of the 1960s and 1970s. When Saenko gambles with a rouble note it is not a rouble note in general, but one particular, unmistakable note ('один совсем ветхий, до невесомости потертый
(3,180)
бахромчатый рубль.'). One thinks of the equally specific and tangible banknote in Elektricheskaya mashina. Or again, the clay that lies under the rich black soil of Magnitogorsk is as

red as ochre and minium; not ochre and minium in general, but rather the kind used by icon painters in Tsarist days to depict devils and the 'Patagonian tongues of fiery Gehenna'. Similar examples could be quoted from almost every page of the novel. In Chapter thirty Georgii Vasil'evich gradually becomes familiar with the work at Magnitogorsk, and things which had been general become specific as he learns their technical names and particular functions (see p.244 above). Georgii Vasil'evich here shares Kataev's relationship to the physical world of things. The astonishingly realistic descriptions of physical objects in Kataev's later works merely represent a refinement of the precision of description and naming present from the earliest works and particularly noteworthy in Vremya, vpered!. The materialism which forms a philosophical undercurrent to the works of the 1960s and 1970s is already present in embryonic form in Georgii Vasil'evich's experience of a physical link between man and object.

4.4.7 Critical Responses to Vremya, vpered!

Not surprisingly, Vremya, vpered! - a major novel on a contemporary theme by an author with an existing reputation - provoked considerable critical response. Apart from many brief reviews, most of which are remarkably similar, the novel was discussed at greater length in several more important articles which do much to clarify the prevailing literary

attitudes.¹ Broadly speaking the reviews may be divided into those (few) which treat the novel as a work of literature and those in which it is regarded purely as a reflection of an aspect of Soviet life during the period of the first Five Year Plan.

As an example of the latter approach to the novel one may cite Gladkov's criticism, which amounts to the view that Vremya, vpered! is a superficial and potentially dangerous novel which reduces the complex question of socialist competition to a headlong race. Worst of all, in Gladkov's opinion, is Kataev's lack of technological knowledge. 'Если автор пишет о бетоне он должен знать, что число замесов в определенную единицу времени не должно превышать твердо установленной нормы.'² According to Gladkov, the phenomenon of record-breaking did take place

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1. In addition to Shklovskii's the principal reviews and contemporary criticism of Vremya, vpered! are:

I. Anisimov, 'Kniga o pafose novogo stroitel'stva', Literaturnaya gazeta, 5 February 1933.

I. Bachelis, 'Magnitostroi vkhodit v literaturu', 30 dnei, 1932, No. 4, pp. 61-3.

B. Brainina, 'Vremya, vpered!', Literaturnaya gazeta, 5 December 1932.

M. Rozental', 'O vremeni i ego geroyakh', Literaturnyi kritik, 1933, No. 2, pp. 135-46.

M. Serebryanskii, 'Odin den' na pole srazheniya', Krasnaya nov, 1933, No. 3, pp. 204-12.

B. Grossman, 'V nogu s vremenem', Kniga i proletarskaya revolyutsiya, 1933, No. 8, pp. 73-6.

F. Gladkov, 'Moya rabota nad Energiei'

M. Shaginyan, 'Kak ya rabotala nad Gidrotsentral'yu'

A. Garri, 'Zhertvy khaosa', Literaturnaya gazeta, 18 May 1934.

L. Levin, 'V etom proizvedenii net pafosa', Literaturnaya gazeta, 24 December 1934.

G. Lenobl', 'Spor o syuzhete', Molodaya gvardiya, 1935, No. 10, pp. 172-82.

2. F. Gladkov, 'Moya rabota nad Energiei', p. 21.

on a few sites, including Khar'kov and Magnitogorsk, for a short time in 1931, but it soon became necessary to put a stop to it by an official decree setting the maximum number of mixes per shift at 250. Kataev's fault lies principally in his lack of any real knowledge of the wider questions involved in socialist competition.

Taking his cue from Gladkov, A. Garri lays much of the blame for the harmful idea of Vremya, vpered! at the door of the ROSTA correspondent (represented in the novel by Vinkich) who constantly bombarded the Soviet press with pleas for increased tempos in the field of concrete laying. According to Garri, Kataev chose to convey the spirit of enthusiasm of the first Five Year Plan by concentrating on the worst aspect of that enthusiasm.

То, что написал В. Катаев о Магнитогорске - это не ложь, конечно, но это наивное заблуждение. Героика наших темпов заключалась не в этом, и поднимать на щит следовало совершенно другие эпизоды из жизни новостройки. А вот эти-то, ¹главные, эпизоды писатель проглядел.

The criticisms of Gladkov and Garri form one extreme view, in that neither says anything significant about the novel as a work of literature. Both critics are concerned solely to point out the harm which could result from Kataev's false view of the place of increased tempos in the field of concrete laying. Many other critics echoed this view, but tempered it with comments about the characterisation, construction or language of the novel. Anisimov's review exemplifies this large area of middle ground in that he takes Kataev to task for a superficial attitude to the record

1. A. Garri, 'Zhertvy khaosa'.

attempt which would be more in place in a sports commentary than in a novel on such a serious topic. Yet he perceptively points to the fan-like structure of the work (Kataev enjoys opening out the fan as wide as possible before closing it neatly) and makes one or two other interesting observations of a purely literary nature.

Marietta Shaginyan also occupies the middle ground, in that her negative review focuses primarily on non-literary questions, but unlike Gladkov she goes on to discuss the implications of Kataev's lack of technical knowledge, and thereby makes an acute observation about Kataev's approach to his work.

Таким образом гигантская величина взятого объекта в связи с недостаточностью предварительного изучения лишила Катаева важнейшего чутья для художника, чутья правды, и поэтому он дал свой эпизод, свою каплю в разрезе эстетического а не реального подхода к строительству, дал стилизацию, а не стиль стройки.¹

L. Levin's highly unsympathetic discussion of Vremya, vpered! takes as its starting point Shaginyan's assertion that the author's approach is primarily an aesthetic one, but instead of concentrating on Kataev's poor knowledge of concrete Levin leaves the reader to infer how dangerous the novel could be and himself discusses the inappropriateness of the literary devices. His principal objection appears to be that the devices used to sustain narrative pace and tension do not differ from those traditionally used in literature and, in particular, used in earlier works by Kataev himself.

1. M. Shaginyan, 'Kak ya rabotala nad Gidrotsentral'yu', p. 16.

Роман Катаева весьма интересен потому, что он с предельной отчетливостью демонстрирует конфликт между традиционными сюжетными приемами и материалом новой действительности. Занимательность романа Время, вперед! и его сюжетная завершенность - пиррова победа. Роман не удался именно потому, что Катаев захотел новую действительность превратить¹ в старые, традиционные до конца сюжетные приемы.

Levin asserts that many of the situations and characters of the novel belong to the world of vaudeville rather than to a serious novel of contemporary life. Superficially his criticism would appear to belong among those based on literary criteria, but the view of literature underlying his analysis aligns it rather with Gladkov and Garri.

B. Brainina, one of the Soviet Union's leading Kataev critics, reviewed Vremya, vpered! at the end of 1932, and while she makes some of the points which so occupied Gladkov and Garri the fundamental thrust of her review is quite different. With her interest in the development of Kataev's career she emphasises that Vremya, vpered! represents a step away from the 'edge' which Mashbits-Verov saw as threatening Kataev's future: 'значительной становится не жизнь "сама по себе", а строительство новой жизни, темпы и смысл которого Катаев чувствует и понимает.'² It is difficult to argue with Brainina's basic thesis, although in her anxiety to present Kataev's novel in a positive light (bearing in mind the criticisms levelled at his previous work) she undoubtedly overstates her case. But hers is an example of a sympathetic review predominantly concerned to point out the literary merits of

1. L. Levin, 'V etom proizvedenii net pafosa'.

2. B. Brainina, 'Vremya, vpered!'.

the novel, while at the same time underlining the efforts made by the Fellow Traveller to transform his world view in accordance with current demands.

By far the most interesting and perceptive discussion of Vremya, vpered! by a reviewer is the hostile review by Shklovskii. He maintains that the motive force for Vremya, vpered! remains Kataev's old strength - metaphor - but whereas in the self-consciously artificial, stylised world of Rastratchiki this method was exactly right, it is inappropriate for a novel purporting to be about real life. Some of the images in Vremya, vpered!, such as that of the wind, succeed without drawing undue attention to themselves, but many others such as the elephant and the tug boat stand out from the novel in a way which detracts from its overall unity. Shklovskii sums up his objections to Vremya, vpered! in the final paragraph of his review:

Нашей общей судьбой является то, что Катаеву так трудно использовать свое старое умение сравнивать вещи и освещать их сопоставлениями в романе, написанном о людях, с образами которых не учила нас обращаться литературная традиция.¹

Shklovskii's brief review brilliantly highlights one of the problems of Vremya, vpered! and touches on the fundamental difficulty facing Fellow Travellers at the beginning of the 1930s. Very suddenly, it seemed, the criterion of what constituted 'good literature' changed, and powerful forces were exerted on authors to change accordingly. Yet for most this was a supremely difficult if not impossible task, for it meant suppressing those aspects of their craft which they most

1. V. Shklovskii, 'Syuzhet i obraz'.

prized and acquiring a new approach, new themes, and new characters whom they did not understand.

Yet by no means all reviewers agreed that Vremya, vpered! represented a step backwards for Kataev. In his review, which takes issue with Shklovskii's, Serebryanskii states: 'Художественной заслугой В. Катаева является то, что при всех недостатках романа...он доносит до читателя пафос героической борьбы за темпы в эпоху первой социалистической пятилетки.'¹ It is difficult to agree with Serebryanskii's view that Kataev achieved his greatest success in the novel with the characters of Margulies, Ishchenko and Khanumov, but in talking of the pathos of the novel he does underline the great strength of Vremya, vpered! - its atmosphere - which makes objections such as those raised by Gladkov seem trifling if not totally irrelevant. There is much truth in Shklovskii's view that Kataev understands the characters of his chronicle less fully than he does those of Rastratchiki, but Shklovskii underestimates the force of atmosphere which Kataev captures and which raises Vremya, vpered! well above the level of the ordinary novel of the period.

Kataev himself was well aware of the value of atmosphere to his novel and it was one of the features which he emphasised in his statements about Vremya, vpered!²

4.4.8 Conclusion

In his 'Raport semnadtsatomu' Kataev gave a brief statement (albeit with the help of hindsight) of his artistic intentions

1. M. Serebryanskii, 'Odin den' na pole srazheniya', p. 207.

2. See, for example, 'Raport semnadtsatomu'.

in Vremya, vpered!.

Я хотел создать вещь, которая бы не только отражала один из участков строительства, в данном случае Магнитогорска - но как бы погружала читателя с головой в его ритм, в его горячий воздух, во все его неповторимые, значительные, простые и вместе с тем героические подробности, пронизанные насквозь одной идеей темпа, решающего все.

Я хотел, чтобы Время, вперед! несло на себе клеймо эпохи. Я хотел, чтобы моя хроника, мобилизуя современного читателя, сохранила свою ценность и для читателя будущего, являясь для него хроникой как бы "исторической".¹

The passage of over forty years since the appearance of Vremya, vpered! allows us to assert that, whether or not the novel 'mobilised contemporary readers', at least the second of the author's intentions has been fulfilled. Vremya, vpered! is still read and its principal value for today's reader probably lies in the evocation of a particular historical moment. Kataev captures the spirit of an age of transition.

Vremya, vpered! occupies an extremely important place in Kataev's work. As the first novel written by him during the period when Fellow Travellers were being subjected to pressure to change their stance it reveals Kataev's response to that pressure, which was both external and internal. To dismiss Vremya, vpered! as a purely cynical response to hostile criticism, such as that by Mashbits-Verov, would be to misinterpret the work and, by implication, to simplify the complexity of Kataev's attitude to art and to the society in which he lives. In 'Raport semnadtsatomu' he writes of the change in attitude which he has undergone:

1. 'Raport semnadtsatomu', p. 105.

Почти полтора года с редким увлечением работал я над хроникой Время, вперед!. Эта работа явилась для меня во многом переломной. До сих пор я писал, так сказать, вслепую, более полагаясь на чувство чем на разум. Чувство для писателя, разумеется, вещь абсолютно необходимая, но, если оно не освещено разумом, не подчинено идее - в полном смысле слова, - художественного произведения не получится. Подлинная красота в искусстве есть синтез чувства и разума.

These words can (and, indeed, must) be interpreted in the light of the tension in Kataev between two opposite artistic tendencies, symbolised much later in Trava zabven'ya by the figures of Bunin and Mayakovskii. The phrase about the need to synthesise feeling and reason is an expression of Kataev's awareness of the two warring principles within himself.¹ The one, dominant in the 1920s, manifests itself in lyricism and precise descriptions of the physical world, and it is most certainly an important component of Vremya, vpered! as of all Kataev's earlier works. The other, which Kataev calls reason, is the need to make his art serve some purpose, the need to avoid Goethe's "hydra of empiricism". Vremya, vpered! stands out among works of the period because, despite considerable pressure, not all feeling is sacrificed to reason.

1. Of course, Kataev was by no means the only author to speak of 'reason' and 'feeling' in the early 1930s.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Second Half of the 1930s:

Historical Novels

5.1 Creative Difficulties

In the years following the publication of Vremya, vpered! Kataev experienced severe creative difficulties as far as prose works were concerned. 1931 saw the publication of his play Million terzanii and two years later he wrote Doroga tsvetov,¹ but his plans for a long novel made at this time, never materialised.² Seeking perhaps to repeat the success of Vremya, vpered! by turning again to a contemporary theme (this time agricultural), the author spent two months during the summer of 1933 in the political section of an MTS collecting material for 'a large novel' which was never written.³

In Moscow literary circles Kataev's difficulties in these years were well known, and formed part of the material for an article about Kataev entitled 'Izgnanie metafor' in which V. Sobolev quotes Kataev as saying: 'У меня сейчас переходный период, период преодоления старой формы, старых творческих навыков. И этот период, естественно, породил производственные трудности.'⁴ Kataev himself, then, ascribes his inability to complete the novel to his search for a new style of writing, which, elsewhere in Sobolev's article, he defines as 'absolute simplicity'. He wishes to make his work accessible to a much wider readership, not only to those accustomed to reading works of literature.

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1. Neither play achieved as much success on the stage as it merited. See V. Frolov, 'Pochemu plokho na khoroshem meste', Aktyabr, 1958, No. 3, pp. 196-209.
 2. See Kataev's answer to the questionnaire 'Itogi goda', Vechernyaya Moskva, 22 April 1933.
 3. V. Kataev, 'Raport semnadtsatomu', p. 106.
 4. V. Sobolev, 'Izgnanie metafor', Literaturnaya gazeta, 17 May 1933.

Стремясь наполнить свои произведения идеей, мыслью, я всячески ограничиваю словарь. Я добываюсь в то же время предельной нагрузки слова. Я хочу, чтобы слово с максимальной точностью соответствовало мысли, которая в нем заложена. Я хочу изгнать из романа метафору, этот капустный коган, эту словесную лукавицу, в которой "триста одежек и все без застёжек"¹ и в которой вместо сердцевины - пустота.¹

Sobolev's article may not be totally reliable, in that he quotes words purportedly spoken by Kataev in the editorial office of Literaturnaya gazeta and not written. Moreover, Sobolev himself appears to have a malicious attitude towards Kataev. (For example he points out after the section just quoted that even when speaking of excising metaphor from his work Kataev is unable to refrain from using metaphor!) Nevertheless, the article presents a picture of Kataev at this time which rings true, and it helps to explain the author's difficulties during the early 1930s. In the attempt to break the world record for the number of mixes of concrete laid in a single shift Kataev found a theme which he could treat in a racy, colourful manner; the immediate urgency with which he imbued Vremya, vpered! allowed him to replace the development of characters whom he neither fully understood nor fully sympathised with, by atmosphere. But it scarcely seems surprising that he should experience grave difficulties in attempting a second novel on an industrial or agricultural theme, one, moreover, in which he would eschew the very features of his style which account for the atmosphere of Vremya, vpered!.

1. V. Sobolev, 'Izgnanie metafory'.

5.2 The Development of Children's Literature

The year 1934 saw the historic first Congress of the Soviet Writers' Union at which the key speeches, laying down the formula for Socialist Realism, were delivered by Gor'kii and Zhdanov. Both emphasised the importance of the theme of construction in modern Soviet literature, and also drew attention to the educative role of literature. The concept of literature as a means of socialist education (in particular the education of young people) was to become a vitally important one in the 1930s. Many works written in this period had as their main theme the formative childhood years of a positive hero or heroine. Ostrovskii's Kak zakalyalas' stal' is perhaps the best known example of such a work, but it is one of many, some of which, like Gaidar's Shkola, were written specifically for children, while others, such as Kaverin's Dva kapitana and Makarenko's Pedagogicheskaya poema appealed to child and adult alike. The growing interest in literature for and about children was reflected in a great many newspaper articles calling for a larger and better literature for children. In an article published in Literaturnaya gazeta in 1932 Shklovskii asserted that young people still read the pre-revolutionary author Charskaya despite her shortcomings as a writer because there were so few alternatives.¹ He closed his article by appealing indirectly to publishers to promote books about modern youth.

1. V. Shklovskii, 'O pishche bogov i o Charskoi', Literaturnaya gazeta, 5 April 1932. Charskaya had been attacked as an unsuitable author for children for many years, but her popularity had not, apparently, suffered. As early as 1910 Kornei Chukovskii wrote a scathing article about her. See K.I. Chukovskii, Sobranie sochinenii v shesti tomakh (M., 1965-9), vol. 6 (1969), pp. 150-62.

Prominent among the public figures campaigning for a richer literature for children were Gor'kii and Krupskaya, both of whom published many articles on the subject. A typical Krupskaya article, written in 1931, stresses the educational importance of socialist children's literature and bemoans the lack of good writers for children. Like Shklovskii, she calls on writers to turn to the creation of a new literature for children. 'Надо создать новые кадры детских писателей. Надо увлечь этим делом молодых писателей из рабочей, из колхозной среды.'¹

The importance of organising children's literature was not lost on the Party. Just as the formation of a single Union of Soviet Writers played an important part in the success of Socialist Realism as the basic method of Soviet literature, so was the centralisation of the publishing of children's books essential for the spread of the type of book advocated by Krupskaya and others. A Party decree of 9 September 1933 set up the publishing house Detgiz, the main aim of which was:

Создать ряд книг, которые, соединяя увлекательность и доступность изложения с принципиальной выдержанностью и высоким идейным уровнем, прививали бы детям интерес к борьбе и строительству рабочего класса и партии.²

The new publishing house approached well-known writers, including Kataev, and asked them to write for children.³

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1. N. Krupskaya, 'O detskoj literature i detskom chtenii', *Pravda*, 3 February 1931.
 2. 'Ob izdatel'stve Detskoj Literatury', *Sovetskaya pechat' v dokumentakh* (M., 1961), pp. 340-1.
 3. In a conversation with the present author on 18 May 1971 Kataev said that he and several fellow writers were approached by Detgiz at this time.

5.3 Beleet parus odinokii

5.3.1 The Genesis of Beleet parus odinokii

The immediate stimulus which led to the writing of Beleet parus odinokii may have been the approach by Detgiz, but the idea for a book about his own childhood had been in Kataev's mind for at least four years, as revealed by an interview which he gave to Pionerskaya pravda in 1931 containing the following paragraph:

Я собираюсь написать книгу о своем детстве. Постараюсь ее написать как можно лучше. Если это может принести пользу современному юношеству - буду очень счастлив. Писать же о современных детях - не могу. Я просто-напросто знаю их очень поверхностно.¹

The book which Kataev had in mind was not, in fact, the first one in the tetralogy (Beleet parus odinokii), but the second book Khutorok v stepi, as he explained many years later:

Был ли у меня замысел хотя бы первой книги - Белеет парус одинокий? Тоже нет. Первоначально был задуман один роман - Хуторок в степи. Но когда я приступил к работе над ним, я стал думать: что предшествовало в общественной жизни событиям, которые должны были совершиться в книге. Начал копаться в биографиях своих героев, докопался до их детства и написал Белеет парус одинокий. (8,409)

The process is similar, as Kataev himself points out, to that which led Tolstoi to write Voina i mir. However, once Kataev finally settled on Odessa in 1905 as the background he wrote the novel very quickly, unusually for him without a rough draft. (8,409)

1. V. Kataev, 'Napishu knigu o detstve', Pionerskaya pravda, 23 March 1931.

5.3.2 Beleet parus odinokii and Mark Twain

Beleet parus odinokii is, in one sense, a personal book in which Kataev recalls the Odessa of his childhood. It has several antecedents within Kataev's work which will be examined later in this chapter, but at this point one obvious external influence on the novel, namely the work of Mark Twain, and, in particular, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, must be considered.

There is no evidence in the shape of statements by Kataev himself that he had Twain's work in mind when composing Beleet parus odinokii, but the similarities are so striking that one is forced to the conclusion that the American author must have been an influence (possibly subconscious) on the Russian. Both novels are imbued with a warm, lyrical, humorous nostalgia for childhood. In both a motherless schoolboy, brought up by an aunt, is befriended by a waif, and the schoolboy's conventional education is enriched by the friendship. Both novels are full, almost to the point of saturation, of the lore of childhood, the hundreds of beliefs, superstitions and turns of phrase peculiar to the young. The list of similarities could be extended to include minor details. There are, of course, differences between the novels. Petya Bachei is more introspective than Tom Sawyer; Twain's novel has no character equivalent to Vasilii Petrovich; the intersection of personal and social themes is less important in Tom Sawyer (although not in Twain's masterpiece Huckleberry Finn). One important difference noted by Shklovskii in his review of Beleet parus odinokii is that

Twain integrates details much more successfully than does Kataev. According to Shklovskii, Kataev's novel is partly marred by an excess of detail which serves no purpose.¹

Fourteen years after the publication of Beleet parus odinokii Kataev delivered a speech at a meeting in Moscow to pay homage to Mark Twain on the fortieth anniversary of his death. His speech, which was later published in Novyi mir, reveals him to be a sympathetic reader of Twain, and although it can tell us nothing about the possible influence of the American novelist on a work written fourteen years earlier, it at least indicates that Kataev is an admirer of Twain's work.²

One curious similarity, which may very well be coincidental but which adds a final touch to the closeness of the two novels, is the way in which Twain and Kataev describe the genesis of their works. In the Preface to The Adventures of Tom Sawyer Mark Twain writes:

Most of the adventures recorded in this book really occurred; one or two were experiences of my own, the rest those of boys who were schoolmates of mine. Huck Finn is drawn from life; Tom Sawyer also, but not from an individual; he is a combination of the characteristics of three boys whom I knew, and therefore belongs to the composite order of architecture.³

Whereas Kataev has written of Beleet parus odinokii:

Был, например, мальчик Гаврик, был его дедушка, была шаланда в которой они выходили в море. Гаврика я хорошо знал, дружил с ним, его звали

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1. V. Shklovskii, 'O Marke Tvene i o tom, kto emu blizok', Detskaya literatura, 1938, No. 20, pp. 21-7. Shklovskii's criticism of Kataev for excessive use of unintegrated detail echoes his attack on Vremya, vpered!.
 2. V. Kataev, 'Mark Tven i Amerika', Novyi mir, 1950, No. 5, p. 229.
 3. Mark Twain, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer in The Writings of Mark Twain, Stormfield Edition (New York and London, 1929), vol. 8, p. xix.

Миша Галий, у меня даже есть фотография... Когда я писал Белеет парус одинокий я видел перед собой живого Гаврика. Но что он делал и как жил в часы, когда мы не были вместе, я не знал. Я фантазировал. Никаких патронов подпольщикам мы, например, не носили. Их носили другие мальчики - наши товарищи. Значит, это могли бы быть и мы. (8,411,415)

5.3.3 Antecedents in Kataev's Work

Beleet parus odinokii has several antecedents in Kataev's work. In their general atmosphere, their lyrical descriptions, and the warmly humorous attitude towards the central hero, the early stories Vesennii zvon and Svyatki u pokoinikov anticipate Kataev's tetralogy. The peculiarly colourful jargon of Odessa and that city's striking social contrasts form the subject matter of a series of sketches published in the spring of 1922.¹ The character of Vasilii Petrovich in the novel bears a certain similarity to the elder Sinaiskii in Otets (although the father in the short story cuts a much more pathetic figure owing to his advanced age and straitened circumstances). Similarly in the figure of the wayward son Petr Sinaiskii (Otets) there is something of the thoughtless, essentially bookish character of Petya Bachei.

The works mentioned so far can be seen as antecedents of Beleet parus odinokii only in a general sense, but another group of works bears a far closer relationship to the novel, to the extent of acting as precursors of particular scenes. In

1. V. Kataev, 'Pis'ma s yuga', Trud, 22 March 1922. The titles of the individual pieces include 'Krem-soda' and 'Golod'. The period covered in these journalistic pieces is later than that described in Beleet parus odinokii, but many of the observations are pertinent to the novel's setting.

the mid 1920s Kataev planned to write a long poem about the 1905 revolution and that particular period of his own childhood but only individual extracts were written and published. One of these - 'Yaponskaya voina' - deals with a young boy's impression of the return of men horribly maimed in the Russo-Japanese war;¹ while the other, entitled 'Pyatyi', relates how a young boy experiments in how to make a Roman candle but only succeeds in blowing up the kitchen stove. Meanwhile more serious explosions are taking place in the city, for the boy's childhood coincides with the 1905 revolution.

Но веку шел пятый, и он перерос
Террор, угрожающий плитам:
Не в кухню щепотку - он в город понес
Компактный пакет с динамитом. (9,611)

The year in which 'Yaponskaya voina' was published also saw the publication of another work by Kataev about the 1905 revolution - the short story Rodion Zhukov. Like the poems, Rodion Zhukov was used to supply certain details for Beleet parus odinokii. Zhukov's journey from Akkerman to Odessa on board a steamer, the moustachioed policeman, even the minor detail of the four blind Jews all find their way from the short story into the novel. But, as has already been shown in an earlier chapter, the character of Zhukov himself and his ultimate fate undergo a striking change between the story and the novel due largely to the need for a positive hero in 1936 and, also, to the fact that the point of view shifts away from Zhukov towards Petya and therefore the sailor is viewed purely externally.

1. V. Kataev, 'Yaponskaya voina', Krasnaya nov', 1925, No. 9, pp. 140-2. The poem appears under the title 'Ballada' in 9,607-9.

Of all the works which foreshadow Beleet parus odinokii the one which most closely resembles the novel is a short story entitled Ushki (1930) which Kataev used in its entirety for one of the major incidents in his novel.¹ The story tells of the passion for gambling with decorative metal buttons which seizes the boys of Odessa during 1905, of how one of them, Petya Sinaiskii, pays his debt to 'the street arab Gavrik' by helping him to carry 'buttons' (which turn out to be bullets) through the police barriers to the insurgents. The story of the buttons occupies an important place in the novel, surviving its transposition remarkably well (largely owing to the episodic structure of Beleet parus odinokii).

For the most part the story of the buttons is recounted in the novel using the language of the short story, but occasionally Kataev seems to adhere to his intention of writing more simply (expressed in 'Izgnanie metafor') by rejecting an image which had seemed appropriate in 1930.

Ладони еще ощущали многообразные формы
скрежещащих как ракушки ушек и их свинцовый
вес. (Ushki, p. 44.)

Ладони мальчика еще продолжали ощущать
многообразные формы ушек и их солидный
свинцовый вес. (Beleet parus odinokii, 5,181.)

However, the few differences in the language of the two versions should not be overstressed, for in general Kataev altered little in transposing Ushki to his novel. Certain changes follow from the fuller characterisation of Petya and his father in the novel. For example, in the scene in which Petya asks for money supposedly

1. Ushki, in V. Kataev, Nozhi (M., 1930), pp. 41-57.

for chocolate and, to his chagrin, is given a bar of chocolate instead, the Beleet parus odinokii version presents a stricter, more pedantic portrait of the father. Another type of minor change grounds the incident more firmly in the 1905 period. In Ushki Petya finds the coin with which he first gambles when he visits the scene of a murder and suicide: 'Ночью исключенный гимназист застрелил из револьвера знакомую гимназистку и застрелился сам.'¹ In Beleet parus odinokii Petya still finds the coin at the scene of a suicide, but this time of a soldier, and the death is carefully set against a menacing background of bad weather, darkness, the howling of the wind and the ceaseless military patrols. Kataev heightens the significance of the coin for the romantic and impressionable eight year old Petya by surrounding it with all the menace which the revolutionary events at this stage hold for a young boy.

One of the most perceptive critics of Beleet parus odinokii - V. Smirnova - has emphasised the central role of the sea:

Море в этой повести так постоянно ощутимо, так придает особый вкус всему, так определяет всю конструкцию вещи, все повороты сюжета, все содержание, как оно определяет характер приморского края, всю жизнь обитателей морского побережья. Море у Катаева - и место действия и широкий, непрестанно меняющийся фон жизни и постоянный аккомпанимент, и поэтический символ.²

Kataev had earlier attempted to convey the ever-changing quality of the sea in several poems and in the short lyrical story More (1928), which has no real plot, but relies for its

1. V. Kataev, Ushki, p. 42.

2. V. Smirnova, 'Ob odnoi klassicheskoi sovetskoi detskoi knige' in O detyakh i dlya detei (M., 1963), p. 290.

effect on the author's skill in conveying the minute differences in the colour and texture of the sea at different times of the day. In More Kataev may be compared to an artist like Monet, in that he paints the same scene over and over again in order to catch the subtle alterations in light and shade caused by the journey of the sun. For example, near the beginning of the story, as the sun rises the sea undergoes a series of very rapid transformations:

Из темного и неспокойного оно сперва стало вдруг совершенно зеркальным, затем из зеркального превратилась в ультрафиолетовое и, наконец, как бы не выдержав дикий ярости своей поверхности, распалось, раздробилось на множество тонов и оттенков - от шершавого голубого до малахитового и закипело под быстро поднимающимся солнцем мириадами пирамидально сыплющихся в воду никелированных гвоздиков.
(1,356-7)

Besides the minutely accurate description of the sea the story is notable for the multiplicity of colour adjectives (many shades from coral to cobalt) for the dynamic nature descriptions (the sky as well as the sea is in a state of continuous change) and for the attempt to involve all of the senses simultaneously. The various smells of the sea and the yacht occupy the author almost as much as the colours, and his sharp ears detect the many sounds around him. Nowhere in Kataev's work do we see a more deliberate or a more concentrated attempt to put into practice the lessons learned in his youth from Bunin than in this short, and oddly neglected story. One marvels at the skill with which Kataev differentiates between the most subtle shades of colour, at the way in which his words almost literally paint a picture (the comparison with painting - and with impressionist painting at that - is for once fully justified).

The author of More resembles the figure of Ivan Alekseevich in Kataev's own story Muzyka, striving to find the only word which will exactly convey the impression he desires. And yet, More fails to satisfy as a typical Bunin story satisfies. The awareness of skill belongs to the author as much as to the reader. It is a virtuoso performance, but it is ultimately rather empty and self-conscious. In several respects More anticipates the late works such as Kubik, reminding one yet again of the underlying unity of much of Kataev's writing, yet it is more superficial than the later story. For all its 'symphonism' (to use the term by which Kataev referred to those features of Bunin's style imitated by him) it remains unidimensional compared with, say, Kubik or Beleet parus odinokii where the precise use of detail, the unerring eye and ear are integrated with other features (plot, characterisation, character of the author).

5.3.4 Construction

The straightforward construction of Beleet parus odinokii rests on the intersection of two main story lines, the first being the everyday life of Petya Bachei, his family and his friend Gavrik Chernoivanenko and the second the story of Rodion Zhukov, the 1905 uprising in Odessa and the minor but significant part played in it by the two boys. The unity of the work derives from the fact that Petya's consciousness, which is so receptive to the physical world around him, develops through his relationship with Gavrik and his exposure to the adult world of revolution. The second half of the novel, dealing in the

main with the uprising, proceeds at a much greater pace than the first, during which Kataev dwells on Petya's perception of the sights, smells and sounds around him. Occasionally a similar role is ascribed to Gavrik or Pavlik, but for the most part Petya acts as the sentient focus of the work, and thus when he falls ill with scarlet fever and when events occur which surpass his comprehension the pace of the entire novel alters accordingly and momentous events seem to follow each other with the speed of an express train.¹

5.3.5 Characters

A distinction can be drawn between the adult characters of Beleet parus odinokii and the children. Whereas the latter are drawn sympathetically and convincingly, the former remain flat, schematic figures (although a partial exception must be made for Petya's father, Vasilii Petrovich Bachei). Too frequently Kataev replaces the detailed characterisation of adults by conventional roles in an engaging adventure story.²

The two revolutionaries Terentii Chernoiivanenko and Rodion Zhukov are stereotyped heroes, embodying all the virtues of their type, such as courage, resolution, strength, and kindness. Both characters differ considerably from their prototypes in the short stories Ushki and Rodion Zhukov. In the former story Gavrik's brother works as a carpenter, and is clearly much younger than in the novel. In the case of Rodion Zhukov the difference between the eponymous hero of

1. Chapter thirty one opens with an extended metaphor in which the progress of the uprising is compared to the approach of an express train.

2. See B. Brainina, 'O nekotorykh osobennostyakh stilya V. Kataeva' in Sovetskaya khudozhestvennaya literatura (sb. statei) (M., 1955), pp. 360-94. Speaking of Kataev's adult characters Brainina makes the perceptive comment: 'Диалектику души оттесняет динамика внешних событий.' (p. 389)

the story of 1925 and the sailor epitomising all the revolutionary qualities in Beleet parus odinokii and the other novels in the tetralogy is considerable. The unsophisticated, passive Zhukov of 1925 becomes the articulate, indomitable revolutionary of the novels. The hero of the short story suffers sickness and delirium and is no match for the Tsarist police who capture him as soon as he steps ashore, whereas in the novel Zhukov uses his great physical strength to escape from the police and swims to safety. The leitmotif of blindness, most evident in the symbolic blind fish, has been replaced in the novel by the symbol of the white sail, bearing Zhukov to freedom. The characterisation of Zhukov in the novel depends in part on his association with the rebellious lone white sail of Lermontov's poem in the mind of the romantic dreamer Petya. In the absence of any statement from Kataev himself one can only speculate on the reasons which impelled the author so to alter the character of Rodion Zhukov between the story of 1925 and the novel of 1936. The change may be partly due to the requirements of the genre, namely the adventure novel for young people, and partly due to the general requirement of the period that a work conform to the method of Socialist Realism in portraying revolutionary heroes as totally positive strong characters.

If Terentii and Zhukov fail to transcend the level of stereotyped positive heroes, the position is a little better with those adults who are closest to Gavrik and Petya, namely Gavrik's grandfather and Petya's father.

The characterisation of grandfather works best when Kataev treats him with affectionate humour, as in his relations with the 'miracle-working' icon, but soon slips into sentimentality when the old man is arrested and beaten by the police. The scene in which he dies has drawn strikingly different reactions from critics, some of whom see it as one of the finest moments in the novel while, for others, it is nothing more than a piece of sentimental melodrama. For Vera Inber the moment of grandfather's death, when he seems to fuse with the world of nature around him, is: 'Одно из самых просветленных описаний смерти, когда-либо читанных нами.'¹ Brainina, however, takes a very different view, namely that the description of grandfather's death owes less to Kataev's observation of life than to his knowledge of literature and that it recalls the excesses of some of his work of the 1920s.² If Inber's praise seems excessive for a passage which undoubtedly owes much to Tolstoi, it is nevertheless true that the passage cannot be dismissed lightly, for the view it contains of the link between man and the physical world around him recurs in one form or another throughout Kataev's career, notably in Svyatoi kolodets.

Сознание, отделявшее его от всего, что было не им, медленно таяло. Он как бы растворялся в окружавшем его мире, превращаясь в запахи, звуки, цвета...

Крутясь вверх и вниз, пролетала бабочка напустница с лимонными жилками на кремовых крылышках. И он был одновременно и бабочкой, и ее полетом.

Рассыпалась по гальке волна - он был ее свежим шумом. На губах стало солоно от капли, принесенной ветерком, - он был ветерком и солью.

В одуванчиках сидел ребенок - он был этим ребенком, а также этими блестящими цыплячьими-желтыми цветами, к

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1. V. Inber, Stranitsy dnei perebiraya (M., 1967), p. 239. The diary entry was made on 31 January 1947.
 2. B. Brainina, 'O nekotorykh osobennostyakh...', p. 384.

которым тянулись детские ручки.

Он был парусом, солнцем, морем...Он был всем. (5,240)

Petya's father, Vasilii Petrovich, bears a certain resemblance to the father of Petr Sinaiskii in Otets and to several other figures in Kataev's work. His is a much more rounded portrait than that of any other adult in the novel, revealing how much more comfortable Kataev feels when working from a real life model than when creating a purely imagined character.¹ Vasilii Petrovich is a man of liberal views and considerable dignity, whose dry, pedagogical manner masks a deep humanity. He is seen at his best in the pogrom scene, where his idealism and decency come to the fore. Although not given to expressions of emotion, he is not cold, and his feigned anger at having to make a fancy-dress costume for Petya merely hides his concern lest the costume should be inadequate.

Turning from the characterisation of adults in Beleet parus odinokii to that of the children, we find that the static, conventional, flat figures of Terentii, Zhukov, and (to a lesser extent) Vasilii Petrovich form a great contrast to the lively, vivid and, above all, sensuous portraits of Pavlik, Gavrik, and Petya.

For most of the novel Pavlik plays a secondary role to that of his brother, adding a leavening of humour which the serious and introspective Petya is rarely able to provide. Pavlik's dominant traits of childish acquisitiveness and a dogged determination to assert his own will wherever possible

1. The real life model is, of course, Kataev's own father.

bring a smile to the lips of the reader, who recognises as true to life the clashes between the young child's scale of values and those of the adults and older children around him. For example:

Там, кроме плитки шоколада и нескольких соевых калетиков "Капитан", лежала главная его драгоценность: копилка, сделанная из жестянки "Какао Эйнем". Там хранились деньги, которые Павлик собирал на покупку велосипеда.

Денег было уже довольно много: копеек тридцать восемь - тридцать девять. (5,19)

The passage quoted serves as an introduction to the most important device used by Kataev in the characterisation of his young heroes, namely a constantly shifting point of view embracing both adult values and language and those of the children themselves. A further and more revealing example of this device as it relates to Pavlik comes a little earlier in the same chapter.

Маленький Павлик, одетый по случаю путешествия в новый голубой фартучек, в тугую накрахмаленную пикейную шляпку, похожей на формочку для желе, стоял в предусмотрительном отдалении от лошадей, глубокомысленно изучая все подробности их упряжи.

Его безмерно удивляло, что эта упряжь, настоящая упряжь настоящих, живых лошадей, так явно не похожа по своему устройству на упряжь его прекрасной картонной лошади Кудлатки. (Кудлатку не взяли с собой на дачу, и она теперь дожидалась своего хозяина в Одессе.) (5,18)

The point of view in the first of these paragraphs is that of the author. Pavlik is observed and described by Kataev, who finds the exact comparison for a type of hat which was no longer in use in 1936.¹ The last few words of this

1. In her diary Vera Inber writes: 'Лично для меня все это имеет особое значение. Я читаю Катаева, и мне кажется, что вернулось мое детство. Когда я читаю, что Павлик в Белеет парус одинокий носил шляпку, похожую на формочку для желе, я вспоминаю, что и я носила такую шляпку в детстве.' Stranitsy dnei perebiraya, p. 239.

paragraph (in particular the word 'glubokomyslenno') act as a bridge to the next paragraph in which the author elaborates on the word 'glubokomyslenno' by recording indirectly Pavlik's thoughts. Gradually, Pavlik's point of view takes over completely from that of the author and the passage continues in Pavlik's language, but without the quotation marks which would formally separate it from the person of the author:

Вероятно, приказчик, продавший Нудлатку,
что-нибудь да перепутал!

Во всяком случае, нужно будет не забыть немедленно по приезде попросить папу вырезать из чего-нибудь и пришить к ее глазам эти черные, очень красивые заслонки - неизвестно, как они называются.
(5,18)

The device of semi-direct speech (nesobstvenno-pryamaya rech') had been used by Kataev in earlier works, but not to the extent that it is used in Beleet parus odinokii, where it is so common as to be fundamental to the nature of the work. For the explanation of the preponderance of the device in Beleet parus odinokii one need look no further than the novel's genre. Semi-direct speech is a regular feature of novels about and for children, for it allows the adult author to utilise the humorous potential of childhood. Moreover it has the advantage of creating the illusion that the author is in a state of sympathetic complicity with his character and simultaneously superior to him and able to mock gently the character's limitations or foibles. All three of the young heroes in Beleet parus odinokii are characterised partly by means of this device, and Kataev thus passes frequently from a purely external picture of a character (as in the case

of Pavlik wearing the jelly mould hat) to a view of the world through the medium of the character's own type of language.¹

Among the most humorous scenes involving Pavlik are the dialogues which he has with adults. His naive questions are amusingly disconcerting in the conversation with his father about the Tsar and, when speaking to his aunt on his return to Odessa, his observations have a refreshing directness and childish originality. In general, Kataev excels in the creation of dialogues between children and adults, further notable examples occurring in Syn polka and Khutorok v stepi.

In creating the figure of Gavrik Chernoiivanenko, Kataev drew heavily on his gift for capturing the reality of speech. Unlike Petya, Gavrik has not been to school and the predominant influences on his speech are the fisherman's jargon used by his grandfather and the street slang of Odessa. The use of Odessa slang in both direct and semi-direct speech was criticised by several reviewers of the novel (a criticism which was to be levelled also at later novels in the tetralogy).² However, its use never results in serious comprehension difficulties, and it contributes to the colourfulness of the novel and to the character of Gavrik in particular. In this novel Odessa slang and Ukrainianisms have a definite function, like the frequent references to particular streets and houses. (Kataev is as accurate, topographically, as

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1. Examples of semi-direct speech in Beleet parus odinokii are too numerous to list, but it is worth referring to an outstanding example, namely the episode in which Pavlik, waking up in the night before his birthday, wonders whether he is still three or whether he has already become four. (5,225-6)
 2. See, for example, Z. Zenkevich, 'Deti v revolyutsii 1905 g.', V pomoshch' sel'skomu bibliotekaryu i chitatelyu, 1936, No. 4, pp. 71-2.

Dostoevskii.) They help to establish a definite geographical and social setting. Thus, the speech of Gavrik and his grandfather is marked by very frequent use of Ukrainian expressions, such as 'pobachimo', 'breshesh'', and 'ne poduzhite'.

Not surprisingly, many early critics and reviewers of Beleet parus odinokii proclaimed the poor Gavrik as the principal hero, relegating Petya to a secondary position. On the whole, this view is untenable. However, while it is necessary to emphasise that Gavrik's role is secondary to that of Petya (if only because of the many expressions of the contrary view to be found in Soviet reviews and critical articles) the importance of the poor boy's role must not be underestimated. He is a Huckleberry Finn to Petya's Tom Sawyer - a contemporary with an entirely different way of life which, while undoubtedly hard, appears exciting and romantic to his middle-class friend. Gavrik is the active protagonist responsible for involving Petya in the adventures which contribute greatly to his education (the visit to Blizhnie Mel'nitsy, the carrying of ammunition to the besieged revolutionaries, the May Day celebrations, the escape of Rodion Zhukov). Whereas Petya almost always accepts a passive role and frequently fails to understand what is happening, Gavrik is constantly active.

Aware, perhaps, of the possibility that his hero will appear too brave and resourceful, Kataev frequently reminds the reader that Gavrik was only nine. Such passages as the following reveal the author's apprehension that the reader might lose sight of the character: 'Хотя, как мы это видели, жизнь Гаврика была полна трудов и забот, совершенно как у взрослого человека, все же не следует забывать, что он был всего лишь девятилетний мальчик.' (5,78) Such overt reminders

of Gavrik's age weaken the characterisation, for they reveal the author's own doubts about this figure whose childhood differed markedly from his own. Much more convincing are those pages where Kataev forgets that Gavrik is a fisherman's grandson and uses him as a vehicle for his own sensuous recollections of childhood. The differences between Petya and Gavrik, for all that they are necessary to the story, are actually less important than the similarities between them. When one of the young heroes feels a surge of pride as he takes aim at a rifle booth or pulls out a pocket watch there is nothing apart from the name to indicate that it must be Gavrik rather than Petya. Because the descriptions and the emotions depend on Kataev's recollections of his own childhood it does not matter which of his heroes acts as his vehicle.¹ Delights of childhood such as a bottle of kvass being opened, or the sensation of drinking cold fizzy lemonade on a hot day are described by Kataev in great detail, and the important thing is the sensuous experience itself, recalled perfectly and transformed into words, rather than the participation of a particular boy in the experience. The sensuous descriptions themselves are of great importance and will form the subject of a separate section later in the chapter.

The only really complex character in Beleet parus odinokii is Petya Bachei whose childhood resembles that of Kataev himself. Despite being much younger than the heroes

1. Of all the contemporary reviewers of Beleet parus odinokii only one appears to have noted the important similarity between Gavrik and Petya. Although B. Reznikov overstates his case he makes some useful observations, such as the following: 'И все-таки Гаврик служит лишь дополнением к образу Пети и часто полностью сливается с ним. ...Это больше чем простая дружба. Это один мальчик в двух лицах, в двух характерах.' 'Povest' o mnogikh prekrasnykh veshchakh', Literaturnyi kritik, 1936, No. 10, pp. 89-101. The extracts quoted are on pp. 90, 91.

of most of Kataev's earlier works, Petya resembles several of them, such as Petr Sinaiskii (Otets) and the heroes of the autobiographical stories Vesennii zvon and Svyatki u pokoinikov. Like them he is dreamy, introspective, excessively sensitive and proud and greatly influenced by his reading. The second chapter, in which Petya bids farewell to the sea and shore, does much to establish his personality. While others prepare for departure, Petya enjoys a solitary and self-indulgently melancholy stroll and swim during the course of which his 'companions' are the heroes of those literary works by which he is affected:

Чувство одиночества с новой силой охватило мальчика. Но теперь это было совсем особое, гордое и мужественное одиночество Робинзона на необитаемом острове.

Петя первым делом стал присматривать к следам. У него был опытный, проницательный глаз искателя приключений. Он читал их, как Майн Рид. (5,13)

More powerful even than the image of Robinson Crusoe or the heroes of Mayne Reid is the effect on Petya's imagination of Lermontov's poem 'Parus'. The lonely white sail, proud and rebellious on the blue sea strikes a chord in Petya's romantic soul, and the boy plays the role of the lonely, proud, rebellious spirit.¹ Kataev prepares the reader for the intrusion of socio-political events into the private world of Petya's imagination by having him associate Lermontov's poem not only with himself but also with the battleship "Potemkin" which he had seen earlier in the summer. The adjectives used to describe the "Potemkin" (using Petya's point of view) are taken from Lermontov's poem:

1. It is worth noting that the feelings of Valya, the hero of Svyatki u pokoinikov, find expression in Chatskii's monologue from Gore ot uma. The figure of the proud and lonely outsider has a powerful appeal for Kataev's young heroes.

'Несколько раз, таинственный и одинокий, появлялся мятёжный броненосец на горизонте в виду бессарабских берегов.' (5,15)

Throughout the book Kataev returns several times to the Lermontov poem which exerts such a powerful influence on Petya. During the school entrance examination it is precisely this poem that he chooses to recite. Significantly, Kataev gently mocks his hero's excessive self-esteem by having the examiners interrupt the recitation before the crucial final stanza. (5,155-6) Petya's image of himself as a lone white sail is frequently subjected to Kataev's ironical glance. In this respect Petya again resembles other autobiographical characters in Kataev's works whose pretensions are ridiculed in a good-natured fashion by the author.

At the end of the novel Petya's identification of the lone white sail with the "Potemkin" recurs in the episode of Zhukov's escape. Whereas Petya was not allowed to utter the stirring third stanza of Lermontov's poem at his school examination, it is quoted in full in the last chapter, where it refers to Zhukov. Inappropriate as it was for Petya (except in his own self image), it is appropriate as a symbol of Zhukov's free spirit and, therefore, used as the culmination of the work.

As befits a romantic, Petya falls in love, firstly with Zoya and then with Gavrik's niece Motya. Kataev expertly conveys the ambivalent emotions of childish love. One scene, where Petya and Zoya surprise and frighten themselves by kissing unexpectedly, owes much to Tolstoi,¹ but

1. See the chapter of Voyna i mir in which Natasha surprises herself by kissing Boris and then runs into the drawing room in order to avoid being alone with him. The corresponding scene in Beleet parus odinokii comes in the first chapter (5,10).

the other 'love' scenes are reminiscent of Kataev's own excellent story Vesennii zvon, written when he was seventeen. Petya's emotions consist of a mixture of adulation and a heightened sense of pride resulting in feigned indifference and condescension. Kataev offers no new insights into the phenomenon of childish love, but by approaching it sympathetically (and, clearly, with a strong recollection of its conflicting emotions) he enhances the characterisation of Petya and Motya.

Another feather which Petya shares with many other Kataevan heroes is his passion for gambling and the lengths to which it drives him. Kataev's fondness for the theme of gambling, with its concomitant desperation, has been noted several times already in the present dissertation. When the urge to play at buttons overcomes Petya it dominates his personality, leading him to steal, lie, and make false accusations, and yet this apparently destructive passion brings a sweet intensity to his life which is irresistible. Like Zagirov in Vremya, vpered! Petya gambles recklessly until he has lost everything, at which point he becomes Gavrik's 'slave', but unlike Zagirov he is secretly pleased by this turn of events since it allows him to wander through the town carrying the 'buttons' in a haversack. Indeed, although the gambling episode reveals a darker side of Petya's personality it is free from the feelings of despair which inform the Zagirov-Saenko episode in Vremya, vpered!.

Beleet parus odinokii does not, in general, represent an advance in Kataev's mastery of characterisation, although his depiction of children, including the particular nuances of

their speech, is developed on a much wider scale than in earlier stories. Against this, however, must be set the fact that the adult figures are, for the most part, pure stereotypes when compared to some of the characters in earlier works. The reason for the artistic success of Beleet parus odinokii is not primarily attributable to characterisation.

5.3.6 Atmosphere

Beleet parus odinokii is a historical novel.¹ The 1930s was a decade which saw the emergency of the historical novel as a major literary genre. Soviet authors turned frequently to history, perhaps preferring relatively 'safe' subjects from Russia's past to the riskier topics of modern politics and society. Alongside the many novels devoted to earlier centuries there were several which dealt with the more recent past including the Russo-Japanese war and the 1905 revolution. The most obvious historical event in the novel is the developing unrest in Odessa following the "Potemkin" mutiny. Apart from the long introductory sequence describing the departure of the Bachei family from their holiday farm most of the action in the novel stems from the historical events of 1905-6. In contrast, the non-historical events, such as the school examination or the Christmas party, for all their importance, act as digressions from the narrative.

1. Kataev's awareness that his childhood coincided with a particularly important period in the country's history is expressed in his poem 'Ballada', the first stanza of which reads:
 Шел веку пятый. Мне - восьмой.
 Но век перерастал.
 И вот моей восьмой весной
 Он шире жизни стал. (9,607)
 Such feelings are, of course, common among Russian writers of Kataev's generation.

Although the direct description of historical events is reduced in the novel to a highly romanticised adventure story, (for example the chapter entitled 'Shtab boevikov' in which Iosif Karlovich is cut down by the Cossacks), Kataev excels, as usual, in conveying the atmosphere of the period through details. Thus, while the street fighting could belong to any period, the mass of carefully noted historical detail lends the book an unmistakable period atmosphere. Occasionally Kataev heightens this impression by stepping from the normal narrative time to address his readers directly and draw to their attention some period detail of which they have no direct experience. For example, he precedes his description of the old steamer "Turgenev" with the words: 'Не следует забывать, что описываемые в этой книге события происходили лет тридцать с лишним назад. А пароход "Тургенев" считался даже и по тому времени судном, порядочно устаревшим.' (5,33) During the voyage to Odessa the ship's captain orders the sails to be raised and Kataev justifies Petya's excitement at this extremely unusual event by another direct reference to this as a period detail:

Я думаю, что и вы бы, товарищи, пришли в восторг, если бы вам вдруг выпало счастье прокатиться по морю на настоящем пароходе, да, кроме того, еще и под парусом.

Даже в те времена парус ставили только на самых старых пароходах, и то чрезвычайно редко. Теперь же этого и вовсе никогда не случается. Так что легко себе представить, как переживал это событие Петя. (5,46)

The novel is extremely rich in details which evoke vividly the period of Kataev's own childhood. In describing the funeral procession of General Kondratenko, who had been

killed the previous year at Port Arthur but whose body reached his homeland only after a voyage of many months, Kataev recalls with great clarity the impression created by the huge lead coffin bearing the remains of a general who had perished many thousands of miles from the Southern port. The sights and sounds of the solemn procession are conveyed in minute detail, evoking the mood of the age much more successfully than Kataev's more direct attempts to suggest the mounting unrest.¹ Similarly, the war against Japan is alluded to through the detail of the anti-Japanese lithographs which Motya has collected.

By means of such period details Kataev succeeds in setting his novel in a precise historical framework.²

No less effective in defining the period are those details relating to the customs and artefacts of a bygone age, which must have seemed the more distant because of the changes in everyday life wrought by the intervening Revolution. For example, Kataev indulges in his habit of giving the brand names of products and describing their packaging at length. Thus, Gavrik shoots not merely with a rifle, but with a 'Montecristo' rifle; he drinks 'Fialka' lemonade; Pavlik eats 'George Borman' boiled sweets; Patya and Gavrik find different sorts

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1. Compare the passage in which the funeral procession is described (5,171) with the inferior one immediately preceding it where the author employs a general approach rather than a specific one. 'Бродя целыми днями по городу, Гаврик не мог не чувствовать приближения событий. Они еще были где-то в пути - может быть на полдороге между Одессой и Санкт-Петербургом, - но к тишине ожидания уже примешивался не столько слышимый, сколько угадаемый шум неотвратимого движения. (5,170)
 2. Many more examples could be adduced, such as the Edict on Freedom, the drunken 'batrak' who interrupts the firework party (and who brings to mind a similar character in Chekhov's Vishnevyyi sad), etc.

of cigarette packets - 'Lastochka', 'Zefir' and 'Tsyganka'; the policeman who arrests grandfather smokes a cigarette which Gavrik recognises as one made at the Asmolov factory.

These and other examples help define the setting of the novel, as do the precise topographical references to pre-revolutionary Odessa. Street names are mentioned frequently, and certain Odessa landmarks are described with Kataev's habitual attention to detail. A full page is devoted to an account of the history of the Kovalevskii tower, one of the city's famous sights. Odessa's colourful markets and fair-grounds, its kvass-sellers, organ-grinders and chamber-maids all form part of the densely detailed setting against which the adventure story is played out. Many of the descriptions form self-contained digressions which do not advance the narrative, but, as in Vremya, vpered!, contribute largely to the atmosphere which is one of the novel's principal features. It was the digressive nature of many of the details in Beleet parus odinokii which led Shklovskii to criticise the novel:

Но подробности в этой книге очень часто даны так, что они не раздвигают мир а только наполняют его.

Умеющий видеть автор существует между миром и читателем...Марк Твен в своих рассказах о двух мальчиках, об их путешествии и приключениях, умел пропускать лишнее. Не надо обставлять героя вещами и сравнениями. Надо увидеть мир, дать самые вещи как отношения между героями.¹

One must recognize the validity of Shklovskii's view that Kataev frequently interposes his own vision between his heroes and reader. It has already been demonstrated that at times Petya and Gavrik are used almost interchangeably due to

1. V. Shklovskii, 'O Marke Tvene...', p. 26.

the fact that the experience being described belongs to Kataev himself and his sensuous descriptions are only nominally ascribed to the character. Yet, while the digressive nature of much of the detail cannot be denied, Shklovskii's implication that this detracts from the value of the book can and should be disputed. It is precisely the interaction between the engaging but superficial narrative on the one hand and the leisurely, digressive descriptions (so obviously relished by the author) on the other which lends the book its specific charm. The atmosphere of Odessa at the beginning of the century is captured in such apparently non-functional descriptions as that of the kvass-sellers. (5,69)

No less important for the atmosphere of Beleet parus odinokii is the vast amount of childhood lore, both local and general, which it contains. Just as the reader of Tom Sawyer learns about strange 'cures' for warts involving swinging dead cats at midnight, so does the reader of Beleet parus odinokii learn that the children of Odessa believed that barrel-organ grinders abducted children, broke their limbs and then sold them to the fairground as acrobats. Pavlik, who inadvertently follows a barrel-organ grinder, suddenly remembers the horrible fate which befalls children caught by the organ grinders when he sees one of the women smoking a cigarette:

Поворачивая за угол, они оба вдруг обернулись, и Павлик с беспокойством увидел во рту у женщины папироску. Ребенка охватил ужас. Ему в голову внезапно пришла мысль, заставившая его задрожать. Ведь было решительно всем известно, что шарманщики заманивают маленьких детей, крадут их, выламывают руки и ноги, а потом продают в балаганы акробатам.

О, как он мог забыть об этом! Это было так же общеизвестно, как то, что конфетами фабрики "Бр. Крахмальниковы" можно отравиться или - что мороженщики - делают мороженое из молока, в котором купали больных. (5,138)

While it is true that Kataev generally draws the inherent humour from the lore of children by employing semi-direct speech he nevertheless clearly recalls the seriousness of such beliefs for the children themselves, and his detailed recreation of childhood myths contributes to the novel's atmosphere.

5.3.7 Style

Despite the intention to write much more simply which Kataev expressed in 'Izgnanie metafor', the style of Beleet parus odinokii does not represent a radical change from that of much of his earlier work. The lyricism, the concrete descriptions of physical objects, the dynamic nature descriptions, the sensuous evocation of a scene - all of these features of Kataev's earlier prose style (and his early poetic style) find their way into Beleet parus odinokii. The one feature of Kataev's style which shows a distinct move in the direction of simplicity in Beleet parus odinokii is his use of simile and, to a lesser extent, metaphor. The title of the article 'Izgnanie metafor' indicates that it was precisely the large number of images in Vremya, vpered! and earlier works which worried Kataev's critics, and, while stopping well short of expunging them entirely, he does reduce their number. In particular, the more fanciful images which had been characteristic of Kataev's style up to and including Vremya, vpered! are here eschewed.

There is only one extended metaphor in the Gogolian manner in the novel, but that is a splendid example. It is

the comparison of the development of revolutionary events to the approach of an express train which occurs at the beginning of Chapter thirty one. Here the approach of the train is described with such attention to detail that one forgets that it owes its existence in the novel to a comparison. The train takes its place among the other aspects of Odessa life which Kataev recalls with great verve. It is interesting to note that Kataev attempts to ascribe the description of the train to Gavrik's experience. 'Как хорошо было знакомо Гаврику, жителю Ближних Мельниц, это чувство ожидания летящего поезда!' (5,169) The attempt to relate such descriptions to Petya or Gavrik can be seen at several points in the novel, but in most instances the experience described patently belongs to the author's personal recollection of his childhood.

The comparison between developing historical events and an express train is an isolated example in the novel. Much more common are similes and metaphors comparing natural phenomena on the one hand and household objects on the other. All of the following examples are taken from the same chapter:

Песок этот был удивительной белизны и тонкости. Вязкий и глубокий, сплошь истыканный ямками вчерашних следов, оплывших и бесформенных, он напоминал манную крупу самого первого сорта. (5,13)

Тонкий туман брызг висит кисеей во всю громадную высоту потрясенных обрывов. (5,14)

Медуза висела прозрачным абажуром с кистью таких же прозрачных щупалец. (5,16)

It could be argued that these and similar images contribute to the characterisation of Petya and Gavrik since the referents are all everyday objects with which the boys are

familiar. While this may be partially true it would be a mistake to give it undue emphasis because the type of comparison involving a concrete and familiar object is used throughout Kataev's work irrespective of whether or not children figure as protagonists.

The similes and metaphors quoted are representative of the vast majority of images in Beleet parus odinokii in that they make use of familiar objects, and they draw attention to purely superficial similarities in the shape or texture of the objects being compared. They lack the exotic quality which had distinguished much of Kataev's earlier writing, and for all the delicacy of perception and sensuousness of the descriptive writing, the style of Beleet parus odinokii is certainly blander than that of Vremya, vpered! and the works of the 1920s.¹

But if the imagery is less exotic than in earlier works, in other ways the style of Beleet parus odinokii reveals many of the features which had characterised the best of Kataev's previous output. Some mention has already been made of the role played by the use of details in the creation of the novel's atmosphere. From his early poetry onwards Kataev had followed Bunin in striving to depict a scene by means of precise details which would conjure up the exact scene rather than a generalised picture. Of the many examples in Beleet parus odinokii, particularly striking is the description of threshing in Chapter four which bears certain resemblances to Kataev's very early

1. The move from an exotic style to a blander one can be seen in many writers whose work spanned the decade from the mid 1920s to the mid 1930s.

sketch 'Iz zapisok gimnazista'. The description in the novel is much more accomplished than that in the sketch, but the two have in common the use of technical terminology and a preference for a close analysis of the stages of a mechanical process rather than a generalised account of the process as a whole. A similar point could be made about the painstaking description of the old steamer "Turgenev" or (in a completely different area) about the sensuous description of the grapes. Not content with the effect which would be produced by a general description of grapes Kataev gives a very detailed account of the different sorts:

Было множество сортов винограда. Крупный светло-зеленый "чаус" с мутными косточками, видневшимися сквозь толстую кожу, висел длинными пирамидальными гроздьями по два, по три фунта. Опытный глаз никак не спутал бы его, например, с "дамскими пальчиками", тоже светлозелеными, но более продолговатыми и глянцевыми.

Нежная лечебная "шашла" почти ничем не отличилась от "розового муската", но какая была между ними разница! Круглые ягодки "шашлы", сжатые в маленькую изящную кисть до того тесно, что теряли форму и делались почти кубиками, ярко отражали в своих медово-розовых пузырьках солнце, в то время как ягодки "розового муската" были покрыты мутной аметистовой пылью и солнца не отражали. (5,29)

Another feature of the style of Beleet parus odinokii which continues a previous trend in Kataev's work is his preference for dynamic rather than static nature descriptions. Of the many lyrical nature descriptions a high proportion capture the effect of changing light as one time of the day gives way to another. As might be expected after the story More, the sea in particular is treated this way:

Сколько бы ни смотреть на море - оно никогда не надоест. Оно всегда разное, новое, невиданное, Оно меняется на глазах каждый час.

То оно тихое, светло-голубое, в нескольких местах покрытое почти белыми дорожками штиля. То оно ярко-синее, пламенное, сверкающее. То оно играет барашками. То под свежим ветром становится вдруг цвета индиго, шерстяным, точно его гладят против ворса. То налетает буря и оно грозно преобразается. Штормовой ветер гонит крупную зыбь. По грифельному небу летают с криками чайки. Взбаламученные волны волокут и швыряют вдоль берега глянцевого тело дохлого дельфина. Резкая зелень горизонта стоит зубчатой стеной над бурями облаками шторма. Малахитовые доски прибоя, размашисто исписанные беглыми зигзагами пены, с пушечным громом разбиваются о берег. Эхо звенит бронзой в оглушенном воздухе. (5,14)

In this example it is, perhaps, scarcely surprising that the sea's constantly changing surface is emphasised since the theme of the digressive description is the various moods of the sea, but elsewhere the same feature can be observed in less obvious contexts.

Берег быстро темнел, становился голубым, синим, лиловым. На суше уже наступил вечер. В море было еще светло. Глянцевая зыбь отражала чистое небо. Но все же вечер чувствовался и тут. (5,52)

The outstanding feature of the descriptions in Beleet parus odinokii is undoubtedly their sensuousness. The novel opens with an extended description of a sound.

Часов около пяти утра на скотном дворе экономии раздался звук трубы.

Звук этот, раздирающе-пронзительный и как бы разщепленный на множество музыкальных волокон, протянулся сквозь абрикосовый сад - вылетел в пустую степь, к морю, и долго и печально отдавался в обрывах раскатами постепенно утихающего эха.

Это был первый сигнал к отправлению дилижанса. (5,7)¹

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1. This description was taken as an example by Shklovskii of the digressive descriptions which he objected to. 'O Marke Tvene...', p. 26.

It is an opening passage which sets a pattern for many subsequent descriptions. All of the senses are involved in an evocation of the physical reality of the Odessa of Kataev's childhood. He remembers the sharp smell of the wild flowers, the sights, sounds and smells of the fish market or the fair, the taste of lemonade or the feel of sand under the bare feet. Sometimes several of the senses come into play simultaneously in a description as in the following example in which Gavrik reacts to the magical experience of the fair-ground rifle-range:

Гаврик подошел к балагану и остановился возле дверей, жадно вдыхая ни с чем не сравнимый, какой-то синевато-свинцовый запах пороха. Особый, кисленький и душный вкус выстрела чувствовался даже на языке. (5,95)

In the best of the sensuous descriptions Kataev succeeds in recapturing a moment from his childhood. Such is the evocative power of his writing that time stops, in the sense that the narrative drops from view, and in the sense that the moment once experienced by Kataev is now relived by means of a precise account of its effect on the senses.

Бутылка выстрелила, но не грубо, как стрелял квас, а тоненько, упруго, деликатно, И тотчас прозрачная вода закипела, а из горлышка пошел легкий дымок действительно распространивший нежнейший аромат самой настоящей фиалки.

Гаврик осторожно взял обими руками, как драгоценность, холодный кипучий стакан и, зажмурившись против солнца, стал пить, чувствуя, как пахучий газ бьет через горло в нос.

Мальчик глотал этот волшебный напиток богачей, и ему казалось, что на его триумф смотрит весь мир: солнце, облака, море, люди, собаки, велосипедисты, деревянные лошадки карусели, кассирша городской купальни...И все они говорят: смотрите, смотрите, этот мальчик пьет воду "фиалка"! (5,103)¹

1. See B. Sarnov, 'Glazami detstva' in *Detskaya literatura 1967 goda* (M., 1968), pp. 125-141 for an interesting view of the link between Kataev's concrete sensuous descriptions and his control over time.

It is here, above all, that one can see the affinity between Kataev and Bunin for whom the recollection of such moments and their recreation in art are all-important. It is a small step from such passages to the detailed sensuous descriptions in which Kataev takes great delight in his later works. Here is yet another case where the 'new' Kataev of the 1960s and 1970s has his roots in earlier work.

5.3.8 Concluding Remarks

Beleet parus odinokii was met with a profusion of admiring reviews and its popularity has never waned with Soviet readers or critics. Its importance in the context of Kataev's career as a whole lies in the partial integration of several factors which, in many other works, pull in different directions.

Firstly, the novel reveals its author to be a conscious stylist. The Buninesque side of his talent is as evident in Beleet parus odinokii as in any work written before the 1960s. Secondly, the committed stance, the 'Mayakovskii' side of Kataev, is here transmuted into a straightforward adventure story involving children, in which the simplified and exaggerated view of politics and society appears harmless. The mythology demanded by Socialist Realism strikes a less jarring chord in an adventure story for children than in a more ambitious fictional form. Following on from this is the fact that Kataev's relative lack of depth in character drawing is here less of a disadvantage than in most of his other full-length works, because the adults form only a background to the activities of the children, who are drawn convincingly and with humour.

Beleet parus odinokii is certainly not Kataev's masterpiece. His weaknesses in the genre of the novel may be less in evidence here than in the later works in the tetralogy, but they are undeniably present. However, Kataev's natural sympathy with the subject enabled him to write a work which is in several respects impressive at a very difficult period of Soviet literature.

5.4 Rassказы (1937)

After the completion of Beleet parus odinokii Kataev began to work more regularly for newspapers than at any time since his days with Gudok. It was undoubtedly a sign of his increasingly committed stance of support for the regime that he frequently wrote articles for Pravda in the late 1930s: 'В 1936 г. я написал роман Белеет парус одинокий и стал много писать в Правде: маленькие фельетоны, очерки, заметки, подвалы.'¹

His work in Pravda was to provide him with the inspiration for his next novella, Ya, syn trudovogo naroda. But before that he published in 1937 a collection of short stories, most of which had appeared before. The book's reviewer, S. Gekht, divided the collection into three categories - firstly, those like Veshchi written by a light humourist; secondly, those autobiographical stories such as Teatr and Syurpriz which revealed Kataev as a mature artist: 'Мир реален и правдив, но у автора особая, ему одному присущая способность: все вещи выглядят более яркими, чем они есть.'²

1. V. Kataev, 'Avtobiografiya' (1959), p. 540.

2. S. Gekht, 'Rassказы V. Kataeva', Literaturnoe obozrenie, 1937, No. 12, pp. 3-6. Quoted extract on p. 3.

This is one of several astute comments which Gekht has to make about Kataev the mature artist. But perhaps the most interesting part of the review is that devoted to the third aspect of Kataev's work as revealed by these stories - namely, what Gekht calls 'Kataev the "avtodidakt"'. Fortunately, he defines his term: 'Автодидант - человек, обладающий приблизительными неполновесными и потому часто неверными знаниями.'¹

The stories written by this particular Kataev are, according to Gekht, Teni and Iz dnevnika. (One would wish to add Zametka which was not in fact mentioned by the reviewer.) All three pieces show Kataev's rhetorical side unleavened by humour, lyricism or acuteness of observation. Without these outstanding qualities of his prose the stories are 'naive and embarrassing' (to use Gekht's apt formula). None of the three is fictional. Like Teatr and Syurpriz they record incidents from Kataev's life, but unlike the latter stories the incidents do not appear to have touched the author very deeply, despite his protestations to the contrary. In Zametka Kataev describes his brief meeting with the 'kolkhoznitsa' Mariya Demchenko who gave her word to Stalin that she would produce at least 50,000 kilograms of sugar beet per hectare and who, despite setbacks from the weather, achieved a figure well in excess of that. Iz dnevnika is a lengthy description in diary form of Kataev's stay at an MTS in the summer of 1933. Teni is a gloomy account of two meetings with people who still hold old-fashioned views about property and who recall the

1. S. Gekht, 'Rasskazy V. Kataeva', p. 5.

Fantomy of Kataev's story of 1923. (2,70-83) The three stories are by no means the only publicistic works written by Kataev at this time in support of the regime. Other examples include 'V zerkale Mavzoleya' (1934), 'Proletarskii polkovodets' (1935), 'Sluchai' (1935), and 'Pervyi chekist' (1936).¹

As examples of publicistic journalism these pieces are certainly not inferior to hundreds of others by famous authors which were published during these years. They show that Kataev, for obvious reasons, was attempting to use his pen for openly propagandistic purposes. Perhaps it is wisest to remember that many of his contemporaries were writing similar pieces and to treat them as the ephemera they undoubtedly are. Yet the inclusion of these examples in a collection of stories serves as a reminder that the line between literature and propaganda was not easy to draw in the 1930s, and the faults inherent in these propaganda pieces spill over into Kataev's next major work - Ya, syn trudovogo naroda. It is interesting, and not a little surprising in view of the year it was written, to come across such an openly scornful assessment of Kataev's propaganda pieces as that by Gekht. His 'three Kataevs' are all discernible in Ya, syn trudovogo naroda, but the 'avtodidakt' predominates.

5.5.1 Genesis of Ya, syn trudovogo naroda

After completing Beleet parus odinokii it was Kataev's intention to continue with further works based on the lives of

1. All of these articles may be found in V. Kataev, Pochti dnevnik, pp. 436-44, 451- 6, 462- 5. These articles are cited in inverted commas, whereas those mentioned earlier are italicised because Kataev included the latter in a collection of stories along with purely fictional pieces.

Petya Bachei and Gavrik Chernoiivanenko. He appears to have envisaged a cycle of six novels.¹ Moreover, the success of Beleet parus odinokii meant that many readers wrote to Kataev asking him for a continuation:

Книга была закончена. Но судьбы героев и их место в событиях внешнего мира не были еще окончательно определены. Хотелось писать дальше. Это желание подогревалось читательскими письмами, которые шли ко мне в громадном количестве. (8,410)

But in view of the rising tension in world affairs and a worsening of Soviet-German relations Kataev was asked to put aside all other projects and write something based on some papers relating to the occupation of the Ukraine by Germany in 1918:

И вот однажды в Правде мне дали пачку хранившихся в сейфе материалов об интервенции на Украине и попросили срочно, отложив всякую другую работу, написать об этом. То были приказы генерала Гофмана, командовавшего в 1918 году оккупационной германской армией на юге России, донесения партизанских отрядов того времени, выписки из немецкой прессы. Познакомившись с этими материалами, я вдруг ощутил в себе "магическую вспышку" и так же стремительно как Парус, написал Я, сын трудового народа. (8,410)

Ya, syn trudovogo naroda is a highly romantic tale relying heavily on folk literature and on the works of Gogol'. It is worth noting that of the two other works about the Civil War written by Kataev in the 1930s one (Chernyi khleb) presents a romantic picture of the excitement and spirit of adventure of the period, while the other (Son) recounts an incident from the Civil War as if it were from a bylina.²

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1. At the end of the review of Rasskazy Gekht writes: 'В частном разговоре Валентин Катаев сообщил, что он задумал шесть книг. Первая часть этого огромного замысла осуществлена. Это роман Бедеет парус одинокий.' (p. 6)
 2. Chernyi khleb (1935), 1, 428-35.
Son (1933), 1, 403-8.

Like Ya, syn trudovogo naroda, with its epilogue set in 1936, Chernyi khleb looks back on the Civil War as a hard but enchanting period. Set in Khar'kov in 1921 it is about the time which Kataev spent working for YugROSTA and UkrROSTA. He and another poet - possibly Olesha - frequently went hungry, but were sustained by the heady excitement of their work, summed up in the phrase chudesnoe, nepovtorimoe vremya!. (1,429) In Son, too, the Civil War is distanced, this time by the style, which makes the story a modern folk tale about a modern bogatyr' - Semen Budennyi. When his army is hard pressed and desperate for rest Budennyi orders all 5500 men to sleep while he alone keeps watch. While they sleep he rides round the camp on his steed Kazbek, occasionally pausing over a favourite soldier such as Ivan Belenkii who has the strength of a giant. Eventually Budennyi wakes his men with a pistol shot just in time to join battle with the pursuing Whites. Again, as with Chernyi khleb and Ya, syn trudovogo naroda, this story views the Civil War from the perspective of the 1930s in that its final scene, in which Budennyi tells his tale to a group of writers, takes place in 1933.

5.5.2 Ya, syn trudovogo naroda

Chernyi khleb and Son demonstrate that in the 1930s Kataev looked back on the era of the Civil War as a romantic period. Ya, syn trudovogo naroda confirms this view. The hero, Semen Kotko, fights in the First World War but although he is sympathetic to the cause of the Reds he chooses not to remain in the Red Army after the October Revolution but to

return home to the land and to his beloved Sofiya. Her father, Tkachenko, had always opposed the marriage but reluctantly agrees when he is reminded that Semen saved him after their division was taken over by the Reds. Several chapters are devoted to the pre-wedding rituals. However, before the wedding itself can take place the Germans occupy the village, hang the two Bolshevik leaders and requisition all arms, and Semen and Mikolka, his sister's fiance, flee to join the Red Army. On hearing that Sofiya is to be forced to marry the reinstated landowner, Semen and Mikolka return to the village in time to stop the wedding but are captured and sentenced to death. They are saved by the intervention of the Bolshevik army; Tkachenko is executed for his collaboration with the Germans; Semen and Sofiya are reunited; and Semen, realising the folly of his earlier wish to live immediately in peace, rejoins the Red Army in order to help win the Civil War as soon as possible. Finally, in an epilogue set in the 1930s, Semen and Sofiya watch proudly as their son, along with thousands of other young soldiers, takes his oath of allegiance on Red Square.

The principal fault of the work is Kataev's failure to give any depth to the characters.¹ Even Semen's sister Frosya, who was singled out by some reviewers and critics as an exception to the general lack of individualisation among the characters, only appears realistic when compared with the other figures in the book. If she is compared with Petya or Gavrik

1. In the case of Semen this may be a deliberate attempt to suggest his typicality. The opening sentence of the work implies that Semen is typical ('Shel soldat s fronta.')

from Beleet parus odinokii it becomes immediately clear that hers is a generalised portrait of an adolescent girl, lacking the specificity which distinguishes the boys in the earlier work.

Ermilov and Pertsov, who wrote the two most interesting reviews of Ya, syn trudovogo naroda, both drew attention to the lack of individual traits among the characters, and both associated this with the influence of folk literature.¹ But whereas, in general, Ermilov approves of Kataev's approach (even going so far as to compare Ya, syn trudovogo naroda favourably with Leonov's Skutarevskii and Doroga na okean), for Pertsov Kataev's method represents an unforgivable oversimplification:

Учась у народного творчества вниманию к героическим сторонам действительности, поэтизации подвига, воспеванию образа положительного героя, наша художественная проза не может и не должна отказываться от своей основной задачи - от разработки характера героя во всех его противоречиях, не должна подменять портрет барельефом.

In particular, Pertsov feels that Kotko speaks and acts as a folk hero rather than an individual: 'Семен - изъясняется как собирательный герой народной песни, его речи полны красоты легенды, но это, конечно, не собственные слова конкретного лица.' Pertsov's observation about the characters' speech is helpful; Semen, in particular, frequently uses a highly stylised form of speech more appropriate in a folk work than in a modern story which purports to be realistic. The nearest equivalent in Soviet literature is probably the stylised speech

1. V. Ermilov, 'Povest' o narodnom schast'e', Krasnaya nov', 1937, No. 11, pp. 229-42. V. Pertsov, 'Epos i kharakter', Literaturnaya gazeta, 30 January 1938.

of the Cossacks in some of Babel's Konarmiya stories. On learning that he must flee the village, Semen says:

Так. Выходит дело, что должен я темною ночью запрягать в подводу коней и выезжать потихоньку как тот вор, со своего же собственного двора. Было у меня родное семейство: мама-вдова, сестричка-сиротка и дивчина, с которою мы по нерушимой любви заручались. Была у меня какая ни есть хата, и хозяйство, и земля, моими руками поднятая и потом моим политая. А теперь выходит дело, налетели на нас откуда ни возьмись те злыдни, стали поперек крестьянской жизни и выжидают меня от моего счастья к чертовой матери, куда глаза смотрят, в ту темную ночь ночевать по степу, все равно как бродягу-цыгана или того серба с обезьяной. (4,88)

If the speech of some of the characters reveals the influence of folk literature, then that influence is also evident in the author's own language in which the lyricism and precision of description are here replaced by a rhythmic, colloquial style which moves the tale swiftly along.

One of the major influences on Ya, syn trudovogo naroda is, then, folk literature. The other is the work of Gogol', especially Vechera na khutore bliz Dikan'ki and Taras Bul'ba. The themes of Kataev's tale and Gogol's Taras Bul'ba are similar, and certain passages from the later work seem to be borrowed in large part from the nineteenth century author.¹ But the descriptions of Ukrainian everyday life which are to be found in Vechera na khutore bliz Dikan'ki are much closer to Kataev's natural mode than are the more grandiose descriptions of Taras Bul'ba and, consequently, Gogol's first work

1. The passages deal with the uprising of the Ukrainian people. For a detailed comparison see N. Malyavkina, 'Povest' V. Kataeva Ya, syn trudovogo naroda' in Voprosy literatury (sb. statei) (Petrozavodsk, 1960), pp. 3-33. It is also worth noting that the partisans read Taras Bul'ba in the catacombs in Kataev's novel Za vlast' Sovetov.

has left a deeper imprint on Kataev's tale. The foreword to Vechera in which Rudy Panko describes the evening parties resembles one of the chapters of Ya, syn trudovogo naroda entitled 'Vecherka', and the best chapters of Kataev's tale, dealing in great detail with the ritual surrounding a betrothal, have some of the spirit of Gogol's work.

The betrothal scenes lift the tale to a higher level, and it is noteworthy that these are the only chapters in which Kataev employs his leisurely, digressive mode, full of specific references to local custom, songs and objects.¹ These chapters rival the parallel scenes in Sholokhov's Tikhii Don for their charm and the author's understanding of the importance of detail in ritual.

Since the early part of the tale is set at the front during the First World War it is scarcely surprising that Kataev drew on his own war experiences. Like many other of his heroes Kotko serves in the artillery. The name of the Volunteer (Samsonov) who takes over as Bolshevik commander is that of a soldier with whom Kataev served and who features in the autobiographical story Pod Smorgon'yu (1939). Kotko returns from the war with a supply of aluminium spoons made from parts of grenades, a process which Kataev had observed and described in his sketch 'Soldaty - narod soobrazitel'nyi' (1916).

The intention behind Ya, syn trudovogo naroda was, as Kataev later stated, to whip up national feeling at a time of

1. The prominence of these chapters indicates that Kataev was still, in large measure, the sharp-eyed observer of everyday life who had been attacked by critics in the previous decade for his bytovizm.

imminent danger. (8,410) It may well have been this aspect of the work which drew Prokof'ev to it after the completion of his cantata Aleksandr Nevskii for the Eizenshtein film of 1938. Like Aleksandr Nevskii, Kataev's tale was about the invasion of Russia and the Ukraine by German forces, and Prokof'ev used the tale for his opera Semen Kotko (1939) with a libretto by Kataev.¹

5.6 Conclusion

Kataev's immediate response to the request by the editor of Pravda that he should write a patriotic work at this time accords with the public stance which the author adopted in these years. His publicistic writing in Pravda has already been mentioned. In 1938 he became a member of the Praesidium of the Union of Soviet Writers and in the following year he was awarded the Order of Lenin for his services to literature.² Almost exactly a decade earlier Kataev had been subjected to a severe attack by a RAPP critic for being 'on the brink' of anti-Soviet activity through his writing. At the end of the 1930s he was undoubtedly a member of the literary establishment, honoured by the State for his literary and publicistic achievements. It had been an important decade for Kataev. With the

1. Kataev first turned his prose work into a play which was badly received by the critics, then into a film and finally into an opera. The critic of Teatr, who signed himself simply E.M., wrote: 'Неужели Катаев так полюбил своих героев, что не в силах с ними расстаться? Нет, не любовь а равнодушие к героям толкает автора к бесконечной серии самоинсценировок и переделок. Равнодушие и непонимание того, что каждый жанр искусства имеет свои законы. Нехорошо, Валентин Петрович!' Teatr, 1939, No. 7, p. 146.

2. V. Kataev, 'Avtobiografiya' (1959), p. 540.

threats of Mashbits-Verov in his ears and the image of Mayakovskii before him he had developed as a Soviet author. Yet his best works of the period reveal that the pupil of Bunin had not forgotten the master who was now in emigration. The 1930s set the pattern for the following two decades, and even, to some extent, for the 1960s and 1970s. From now on Kataev's loyalty to the regime was never to be called into question and was to be demonstrated frequently in the 'public' side of his work. But the other face of the author was never totally hidden and was to be seen sporadically even during the bleakest period of his creative life - the 1940s and 1950s.

CHAPTER SIX

The 1940s and 1950s

6.1 War Stories

When the Soviet Union entered the Second World War, Kataev, as a famous writer and a regular contributor to Pravda, worked as a war correspondent, sending articles to the newspaper from several battlefields including the battle of Orel.¹ As had been the case in the First World War, the best of Kataev's war sketches and short stories are based on sharp incongruities between the horrors of war and the ordinary activities of soldiers at the front during lulls in the fighting. In some stories he describes battles and troop movements but he clearly prefers the unusual incidents and coincidences which war throws up. In Leitenant (1942) a Party meeting at an airforce base is interrupted by an alarm, and Lieutenant Borisov, whose application for membership was on the agenda, has to leave the meeting, only to be killed in action a few minutes later. When he is dragged dead from his aircraft the commissar asks the Party meeting to vote on his membership, and he is posthumously elected to Party membership.² In Kontsert pered boem (1942) a famous singer of Russian folk songs relates how she sang to soldiers on the eve of a battle and how, in the midst of the battle, she performed for wounded and dying men.³ Fotograficheskaya kartochka (1942) was to serve as the basis for Kataev's play

1. Of this period Kataev has written:

Был военным корреспондентом Правды и Красной Звезды, где печатались мои очерки с фронта.

Участвовал в качестве военного корреспондента в боях под Ржевом, под Духовщиной, в великой битве за ОREL, а также во время наступления Немеца на Умань-Яссы.

V. Kataev, 'Avtobiografiya' (1959), p. 540.

2. V. Kataev, Pochti dnevnik, pp. 228-32.

3. Pochti dnevnik, pp. 222-5.

Sinii platochek written the following year. The story tells how a young girl sends a parcel to the front line which contains, among other things, her photograph bearing the words 'to the bravest man'. Later, when working as a nurse, she finds the photograph among the belongings of a seriously wounded soldier, nurses him back to health and then marries him.¹

Apart from a few short satirical stories such as Kraski Gebbel'sa (1941) and Razgrommel' (1943) which recall Kataev's work of the 1920s under the pseudonym "Starik Sabbakin", most of his longer wartime stories are emotional or sentimental and frequently based on incongruity.²

Tretii tank (1942) bears a certain resemblance to Kontsert pered boem. Three tanks break through the enemy line on a reconnaissance mission which is simply one of many everyday tasks for the troops. During their absence a troupe of musicians arrive to give a concert for the soldiers. Concern mounts as two tanks return but there is no sign of the third. When at last it arrives safely the concert has ended, but, seeing the disappointment of the tank crew, the musicians repeat their performance.

The story is told in a terse style completely devoid of ornamentation and using many short, simple sentences:

Облако снега взорвалось и опало, Танк попятился. В стене рельефно обнаружился глубокий отпечаток его лобовой части, рубчатые оттиски гусениц. Из-за вала затыкали противотанковые ружья. Послышались короткие, сухие очереди автоматов. (1,455)

1. Pochtii dnevnik, pp. 232-5.

2. Kraski Gebbel'sa, 2, 456-8. Razgrommel', 2, 467-9.

Kataev's best-known short stories of the war period, Flag (1942) and Otche nash (1946), unlike Tretii tank, deal with very dramatic incidents.¹ In the former a small Soviet garrison on a beleaguered island refuses to comply with a German order to fly a white flag. Instead a huge red flag flies from the flagpole as the men prepared to die in battle. Otche nash is the harrowing tale of the death of a Jewish mother and her young son in Odessa during the Rumanian occupation. In an attempt to avoid being sent to the ghetto they walk round the town all day, but after they are forced to spend a night in the open their frozen bodies are picked up next morning and thrown into a lorry.

Both stories achieve their effect largely by means of incongruity, by a surprising contrast. To the German officer any resistance by the tiny Soviet garrison appears irrational and, therefore, unthinkable. As a result, when he sees a huge flag fluttering over the garrison he assumes that it is red only because of the rising sun, but in fact the men on the island have raised a huge red flag as a sign of their unwillingness to surrender. In Otche nash, the pathos of the death of a mother and her son is heightened by the fact that each morning the Lord's Prayer is read in Rumanian by a child and broadcast over loudspeakers in the streets. There is a shocking incongruity between the wooden sound of the Jewish boy's frozen body bouncing off the floor of the lorry and the

1. Flag, 1, 459-65. Otche nash, 1, 466-75. This story was written after the war, but it is considered hereto be a wartime story because of its subject matter and because the idea for it dates from Kataev's visit to Odessa in 1944 (see 1,602).

simultaneous tender sound of the Lord's Prayer being recited by a child. Both Flag and Otche nash reveal aspects of Kataev's approach to the theme of war which recur in his novel Za vlast' Sovetov. For example, Kataev's predilection for the striking detail used to heighten the dramatic effect of a scene and his sympathy with the plight of children caught up in a war are important elements in Za vlast' Sovetov.

6.2 Zhena

In the spring of 1942 Kataev's brother Evgenii was killed while on his way to report on a battle for one of the central newspapers. (Like his elder brother, Evgenii Petrov served as a war correspondent.) Immediately before his death he and Kataev had been staying in the Hotel Moskva in Moscow which was used as a base for war correspondents in the capital. A. Erlikh, who was with Kataev in the hotel when the news of Petrov's death reached him, recalls:

Мы с Валентином Катаевым достали ключ от осиротевшего номера в гостинице. Катаев бродил по комнате, машинально притягивался к ручкам и карандашам в пластмассовом стаканчике на письменном столе, которые так и не дождались на этот раз возвращения своего хозяина.

Мы долго не находили никаких слов. Наконец Катаев сказал:

- Завтра или послезавтра, не позднее, здесь поселится новый жилец.¹

This incident sheds some light on an aspect of Kataev's work Zhena (1943) which puzzled and irritated one reviewer,

1. A Erlikh, 'Oni rabotali v gazete', Znamya, 1958, No. 8, p. 189.

namely why such a large proportion of the work takes place in hotel rooms, including the Hotel Moskva.¹ Zhena is dedicated to the memory of Evgenii Petrov and was partly written in Kuibyshev when Kataev visited that city in connection with his brother's death.² On the surface it appears to have little to do with the death of Petrov, but, on closer examination it becomes clear that Kataev's bereavement accounts in large measure for the story's inspiration.

While on a visit to a battle front the narrator meets a young woman who has come to the front to see the grave of her husband whose fighter plane was shot down over a year previously. While they are waiting for a Soviet attack to be mounted she tells him the story of her courtship and marriage, of her work in a munitions factory, and of the death of her husband.

Brainina's review of the work criticised the author for being more interested in describing the peaceful scenes in pre-war Sevastopol' and the brief period which the young couple spent in the Hotel Moskva in Moscow before the husband returned to his unit than in concentrating on the important work in the factory.³ It is true that the best pages of Zhena are those describing the Crimea in summer. Here Kataev achieves an echo, albeit a faint one, of the evocative descriptions which had distinguished Beleet parus odinokii. So

1. One reviewer wrote: 'Любовь героев начинается и завершается в номере гостиницы. Эта деталь, как впрочем, и вся история любви героев не вяжется с представлениями о жене, о семейной жизни, основанной на общем быте, на крепких и прочных внутренних связях.' В. Brainina, 'Khrustal'naya bukhta', Znamya, 1944, No. 4, p. 150.
2. Kataev has written: 'Жена мною написана, когда я во второй раз был в Куйбышеве, - в связи со смертью брата.' (4,490)
3. В. Brainina, 'Khrustal'naya bukhta', p. 150.

blissful is Nina's holiday in Sevastopol' and so full of the promise of happiness is her brief marriage to Andrei that the intrusion of the war comes as a great shock. Kataev deliberately contrasts the peaceful scenes before the war with the descriptions of the death of Andrei and the battle scene at the end of the story. Nina's grief is genuinely shared by the author, and although her portrait is not fully rounded she is sympathetically drawn by an author who had just experienced personal grief. Nina's recollections of happiness centre on the Crimea in summer and on the Hotel Moskva, just as Kataev himself must have thought of the Black Sea and of the hotel in Moscow where he had last seen his brother alive.¹

The scenes set in the factory are, in contrast to those dealing with Sevastopol', hastily drawn. An element of socialist competition exists between two workers at the factory, but their approach to it is an exact replica of that of Mosya and Ermakov in Vremya, vpered!. It is clear that the story is inspired by genuine feeling only when it deals with the personal happiness and grief of the heroine. The minor characters, the scenes in the factory and the description of the battle at the end are all subservient to the main point of the story, namely the great contrast between peace, sunshine and love on the one hand and war and death on the other. The suddenness and irreversibility of the death

1. It may be significant that one of Petrov's last assignments was to Sevastopol'. In travelling by sea from Sevastopol' to Novorossiisk he was thrown overboard during an enemy air attack, but managed to get back on board. See V. Erlikh, 'Oni rabotali v gazete', p. 189.

of a loved one is conveyed convincingly by Kataev, and despite its many weaknesses Zhena has the capacity to move the reader by the genuine feeling which inspires its best pages.

6.3 Stories for Children

By the early 1940s Kataev had two young children of his own, and during the decade he wrote several works for and about children. Before the outbreak of war he published two fine fairytales, Dudochka i kuvshinchik and Tsvetik-semitsvetik (both 1940), in which he demonstrates his mastery of the genre. Zhenya and Pavlik, Kataev's two children, play a role in both fairytales as they do in Kataev's first story about the war, Na dache, written in 1941. In this story Kataev relates how he and his family were roused one night by air-raid sirens and how they sat together until the raid was over, the three-year-old boy failing to understand what was happening, but the five-year-old girl, Zhenya, already realising the danger of war. In itself Na dache is a slight story, but it indicates Kataev's concern for children during wartime, a theme which was to occupy him for most of the decade.

Elektricheskaya mashina (1943) is the exception to Kataev's work about children in this period in that it does not deal with the war. In it Kataev returns to the heroes of Beleet parus odinokii for a story which, although self-contained, does act as a pendant to the novel of 1936. Many of the features of the novel are repeated in the story, notably the keen ear for dialogue, the very good characterisation of Petya, the many digressions (for example about the well-known eccentrics

of Odessa) and the precise description of physical objects. Elektricheskaya mashina is an excellent story, revealing Kataev at his most humorous, but it adds nothing new to the corpus of his work.

In 1944 Kataev returned to the theme of the war with 'Bochka', a short poem for children telling how Soviet soldiers used a barrel to outwit the Germans, and, Syn polka. The latter is one of the author's most famous works for which he received a Stalin prize.¹ In the context of Kataev's career, Syn polka may be a minor work but in the context of Soviet literature for children it has an important place, being one of the better war stories for young people written in those years. The theme of a child playing an active part in the war recurred time and again in the 1940s. Typical titles include Syn korablya by Yu. German, Syn partizana by A. Yakobson, Obyknoennye rebyata by Lev Kassil' and Val'ka s torpednoi devyatki by A. Perventsev. Thus in writing about an orphan who is 'adopted' by a regiment and helps the soldiers in their reconnaissance work Kataev was both exploring his own interest in the theme of a child in wartime and taking part in a common trend among writers of books for children. Once again the characterisation in Syn polka lacks depth. Even Vanya Solntsev, the orphan himself, is an unidimensional figure when compared with Petya and Gavrik. Above all he lacks the specificity of Petya Bachei. Vanya acts as a representative child rather than being an individual.

1. V. Kataev, 'Avtobiografiya' (1959), p. 540.

6.4 Za vlast' Sovetov

6.4.1 Genesis of the Novel

The first public indication that Kataev was working on a novel about the Odessa partisans came in a brief article in Vechernyaya Moskva on 1 January 1946:

Закончив роман Сын полка я начал писать новый роман. Он называется Пионеры и мои герои в нем заметно выросли. Гаврик стал секретарем подпольного райкома партии, Петя - членом коллегии защитников. Действие происходит в той же Одессе, в знаменитых катакомбах в период Отечественной войны.¹

In April 1944 and January 1945 Kataev visited Odessa, which had recently been liberated from the occupying forces. It was the experience of meeting leading partisans and visiting the catacombs which gave the author the idea for a sequel to Beleet parus odinokii in which Petya and Gavrik would be partisans. Of the original inspiration for Za vlast' Sovetov he writes:

В конце войны я попал в Одессу и узнал о героической борьбе моих земляков-партизан, укрывавшихся в катакомбах. Полный впечатлений от услышанного, от того, что я видел в городе и в самих катакомбах, я вдруг понял, что в подвигах одесских партизан должны были участвовать, конечно, и мои старые герои. По горячим следам этих впечатлений, я написал роман За власть Советов!. (8,410)

The immediate result of Kataev's visit to Odessa and his conversations with the partisans was the essay 'Katakomy'.² In it he describes how he met the partisans Lazarev, Ilyukhin and Gorbil' and went with them into the catacombs. 'Katakomy'

1. V. Kataev, 'Vstrechi so starymi geroyami', Vechernyaya Moskva, 1 January 1946.
2. Izvestiya, 22, 23, 24, 27 March 1945. Later under the title 'Odesskie katakomby', 8, 191-216. References to this edition.

presents a romantic picture of the activities of the partisans, stressing the excitement and comradeship of life in the catacombs rather than its physical difficulties and unpleasantness. At least one commentator expresses serious doubts about the veracity of Kataev's view of the life of the partisans. In his Russia at War Alexander Werth, who also visited the catacombs in April 1944, writes:

There is some doubt, too, about the real importance of the Soviet 'underground' operating from the inextricable labyrinth of the Odessa catacombs, with their dozens of miles of subterranean passages, some of them as much as 100 feet underground. Many romantic stories (notably by V. Kataev) were written towards the end of the war about the 'only urban partisans in the world', and about some of the communist chiefs such as S.F. Lazarev, I.G. Ilyukhin and L.F. Borgel [sic - RR], who functioned throughout the Rumanian occupation and spread perpetual terror among the invaders. It seems that, in reality, the Soviet underground in Odessa used the catacombs (which had many secret entrances inside houses) only in cases of great emergency and that although some food and arms dumps were hidden there, very few people (if any) actually lived in the catacombs for any length of time. Some Jews were said to have lived there right through the occupation, but the extreme damp of the catacombs makes this highly doubtful... It is perhaps significant that serious Soviet post-war studies of the war say very little of the 'catacomb partisans', and certainly do not describe them as a major underground army which (as the partisan chiefs claimed on April 14, 1944) 'could have occupied Odessa and thrown out the Germans if the Red Army had not arrived in time'. Such boasts were wholly unsubstantiated.¹

However, although the accounts of the resistance given by Lazarev and other partisan leaders may be unreliable, it was principally those stories and his meetings with the partisans themselves which prompted Kataev to write his novel.² Lazarev

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1. A. Werth, Russia at War (London, 1964), pp. 833-4.
 2. Lazarev's own account of his wartime activities may be found in S.F. Lazarev, 'V tylu u vraga', Chernomorska komuna, 20 June 1944 quoted in F. Sizykh, 'Fakticheskaya osnova i vymysel v romane V. Kataeva Za vlast' Sovetov!', Uchenye zapiski Leningradskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo instituta im Gertsena, vol. 32, No. 2, 1958, pp. 297-324.

himself appears to have served as the prototype for Gavrik Chernoiivanenko. The only description of him which Kataev provides in 'Katakomby' has very few concrete details, but Chernoiivanenko's small stature and sickly look come from the real-life partisan:

Нас познакомили. Я видел небольшого человека средних лет, с ординарным, немного болезненным лицом, по внешности типичного районного партийного работника, наковым он в действительности и был. Ничего исключительного, а тем более героического при всем желании нельзя было отыскать в его фигурке. (8,193)¹

Chernoiivanenko may resemble Lazarev physically only in the most general way, but some of his actions are based on Lazarev's life. For example, the poem which Chernoiivanenko composes and recites in the catacombs belongs to the pen of Lazarev, who claims to have recited it in very similar circumstances to those described in the novel.² The romantic aspect of life in the catacombs, which Werth found unlikely, undoubtedly owed much to Kataev's own romantic imagination, but it may also have been partly due to Lazarev's presentation of the facts. In 'Katakomby' the partisan is quoted as saying: 'Видите, какая у нас была хлопотливая жизнь, - с улыбкой сказал Лазарев. - Прямо-таки 80,000 лье под водой или, вернее, под землей. Жюль Верн.' (8,201)³

1. F. Sizykh, who met Lazarev in 1956, is able to add a little more detail about his physical resemblance to Chernoiivanenko: 'В романе, особенно в первой редакции, запечатлены индивидуальные портретные особенности Лазарева: "маленькая, сухая и крепкая фигурка", "носик, который он то и дело моршил", "острые, недоверчивые глаза".' 'Fakticheskaya osnova i vymysel...', pp. 508-9.
2. The poem is printed in the novel (6,466-7) where it is attributed to Chernoiivanenko. In the sketch 'Katakomby' Kataev reveals that Lazarev composed the poem and that he (Kataev) committed it to memory. (8,203-4) Of the impression made on him by Lazarev's verses Kataev has written: 'Эти слова, написанные поэтом-самоучкой, может быть не всюду ладно и гладко, тем не менее произвели на меня громадное впечатление. Каждое слово в них, каждая мысль была глубокого прочувствования, правдива, честна и благородна. Это были не стихи. Это была сама жизнь.' *Odessa v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine sovetskogo naroda*, vol. 2 (Odessa, 1949), pp. 222-3.
3. It is interesting to note that when ascribed to Chernoiivanenko these sentiments were to be criticised as unlikely.

Gavrik was not the only character partially based on a real person. For the figure of Druzhinin/Pavlov Kataev drew on the life story of one of the most famous heroes of Odessa during the Second World War - Molodtsov who used the pseudonym Badaev.¹ Some of the details of Druzhinin's campaign, for example his blowing up of the Gestapo building, his meeting underground with Gavrik's band and the entire incident of his capture, torture, and execution were based on fact. Molodtsov, like his fictional counterpart Pavlov, was an officer of the NKVD, but his activity as a partisan occupied a far shorter period than in Za vlast' Sovetov, his execution taking place in July 1942.² Here, as elsewhere, Kataev bases part of his novel on fact, but achieves a more dramatic effect by altering dates and minor particulars.

Tsimbal is the third of Kataev's fictitious partisans to be based on a real person, namely L.F. Gorbel'. But as with the other figures Kataev took only the most striking features of the partisan's personality for his fictional counterpart, in this case Gorbel's wit and cheerfulness.³

Kataev's brief acquaintance with Lazarev and Gorbel' and his reading of Molodtsov's diary provided him with some general character traits for his central heroes. Much more important, however, was the role of events in the underground battle against the German and Rumanian occupation forces, which

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1. For details of Molodtsov see A. Shnaider, 'Ocherk o kapitane Badaeve i komsomol'tse Yashe Gordienko' in Odessa v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine sovetskogo naroda, vol. 2, pp. 205-14. See also A. Borisov, Odessa - gorod-geroi (M., 1954), p. 55.
 2. See Kataev's introduction to Molodtsov's diary, Komsomol'skaya pravda, 18 September 1960 (supplement).
 3. F. Sizykh, 'Fakticheskaya osnova i vymysel...', p. 312.

were used by the author as the basis for his novel's plot. (In this there is no implication that the events actually took place as described in the various sources - merely that the sources were available to Kataev.) All of the major incidents in Za vlast' Sovetov can be traced back to factual events, or, at least, current legends which Kataev incorporated creatively into his work. In other words, he exaggerated the role of the central characters and changed the emphasis and the chronology for the purposes of his novel, but he did not invent entire incidents. For example, Badaev's secretary reports that the house on Engels Street which was used as the Gestapo Headquarters was blown up by a Komsomol group led by a certain Chebotar', acting under Badaev's instructions.¹ In the novel this incident is transformed into a dramatic cameo in which Druzhinin, disguised as an S.S. officer, blows up the building from the nearby park and then marches past it in order to see what damage he has done.

Another example of the re-working of published material concerns the escape of Bachei, Chernoiivanenko, and Motya Perepelitskaya from the catacombs at the end of the novel. Writing in the Odessa newspaper Bol'shevistskoe znamya in October 1945, P. Mel'nichenko describes a similar escape which took place in 1942:

- Мы замурованы, но выход должен быть найден - обратился к партизанам командир. Поцеловав свое Красное знамя с вышитыми на полотнище словами священной клятвы, партизаны ушли на розыски выхода. Горючее на исходе. Пришлось отказаться от "летучей мыши" а жечь маленькую копилку. Шесть дней обессиленные партизаны искали выхода. Отощавшие от голода люди передвигались ползком. Вдруг, словно в

1. As reported by Badaev's secretary to Sizykh. See F. Sizykh, 'Fakticheskaya osnova i vymysel...', p. 306.

приключенческом романе, в самую, казалось, последнюю минуту, когда силы окончательно покидали людей, заиграло пламя заветной копилки. Играет пламя - это приток воздуха, это чудесный предвестник жизни. Крик радости вырвался из груди.¹

By transferring the incident from 1942 to the very eve of liberation Kataev heightens its dramatic effect, but his account essentially accords with Mel'nichenko's.

The description of the capture, torture and execution of Druzhinin, Svyatoslav and Valentina is based on the widely reported story of the death of Badaev and his radio operator Yasha Gordienko which one historian records in these words:

В феврале 1942г. фашистской контрразведке удалось схватить на одной из явочных квартир отважного командира Молодцова и его связного Яшу Гордиенко. Фашисты жестоко издевались над советскими партизанами, применяли всевозможные пытки... Но выведать имена партизан и места их укрытия фашистам не удалось. Верный сын Родины, коммунист Молодцов не произнес ни одного слова. Когда, после вынесения смертного приговора ему было предложено подать прошение о помиловании, он сказал: - Я русский и₂ на своей земле просить пощады у врага не собираюсь.²

These examples could be multiplied. The incident in which the enemy forces send a local boy into the catacombs with an ultimatum for the partisans is drawn from Mel'nichenko.³ The meeting underground of Druzhinin's group of partisans and Lazarev's, the initial mistrust and the writing of the mysterious word Kot is verified by L.F. Gorbel' in his unpublished memoir 'Tak bylo'.⁴ Kataev himself relates in 'Katakomby' how he found copies of Lenin and of Gogol's Taras Bul'ba (the books which Chernoiivanenko's group read as part of their cultural recreation) in the catacombs. (8,214-5)

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1. P. Mel'nichenko, 'Podsnezhnik', Bol'shevistskoe znamya, 14 October 1945. See also a similar description by Lazarev as recounted to Kataev (8,210).
 2. A. Borisov, Odessa - gorod-geroi, p. 55.
 3. P. Mel'nichenko, 'Podsnezhnik'.
 4. See F. Sizykh, 'Fakticheskaya osnova i vymysel', p. 303.

Thus, an important part in the genesis of Za vlast' Sovetov was played by the accounts of participants in the Odessan resistance. Equally important, however, (and, in some ways, inimicable to the factual inspiration for the work) was Kataev's wish to make his new novel a sequel to Beleet parus odinokii and to recapture the atmosphere of the 1936 work. Some idea of the dual intention behind the novel, and of Kataev's uncertainty about whether it was intended for adult or child readers, may be gained from the fact that, before publication of the complete novel in 1949, an extract was published as a complete book entitled Pioner, in a format and with drawings clearly aimed at young readers.¹ Moreover, when the full novel was published it appeared simultaneously in Novyi mir and in the children's newspaper Pionerskaya pravda.²

6.4.2 Critical Response to the First Version

The dual purpose of Kataev's new work provided the critics of the first version of the novel with ammunition. Shortly after its appearance Za vlast' Sovetov was subjected to serious and extensive criticism. After a decade during which Kataev had often been praised by critics not only for his literary talent but also for his political stance and his presentation of history, he was once again subjected to threatening criticism reminiscent of 'Na grani'.

1. V. Kataev, Pioner (M., 1948) and Pioner, Chast' vtoraya (M., 1949).

2. Novyi mir, 1949, Nos. 6, 7, 8.
Pionerskaya pravda, 12 July - 21 October 1949.

When the first brief reviews of Za vlast' Sovetov appeared in Izvestiya, Ogonek and Pravda there was little evidence of the extensive critical attack to come. On balance these reviews were positive. N. Zhdanov opened his review in Izvestiya with these words:

Как и в прежних своих произведениях В. Катаев проявил себя отличным мастером повествования, кинематографически наглядного изображения людей и событий. Роман В. Катаева - произведение значительное по содержанию и увлекательное по форме.¹

M. Kuznetsov, writing in Pravda, went as far as to praise Kataev's emphasis on the role of the Bolsheviks in the partisan struggle:

Великой вдохновляющей силой, цементирующей волю и мужество советских патриотов, выступают в романе большевики. Подпольный райком партии - Черноиваненко, Синичкин-Железный, Туляков, Цимбал, а также бесстрашный разведчик-большевик Дружинин находятся все время в центре повествования.²

The reviews by Zhdanov and Kuznetsov were not entirely uncritical of Za vlast' Sovetov but, on balance, they were favourable. However, although these reviews appeared in important central newspapers they did not express the official view of Kataev's novel, for the next review to appear - that of M. Bubenov in Pravda - was accompanied by a note from the editor endorsing the reviewer's criticisms and declaring Kuznetsov's earlier review in the same newspaper to be erroneous.³ There could be no doubt that such an explicit note in the main Party newspaper carried the weight of official opinion, and it therefore set the tone for all subsequent

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1. N. Zhdanov, 'Za vlast' Sovetov', Izvestiya, 30 September 1949.
 2. M. Kuznetsov, 'Roman o sovetskikh patriotakh', Pravda, 8 January 1950. See also M. Semenov, 'Za vlast' Sovetov', Ogonek, 1949, No. 47, p. 24.
 3. M. Bubenov, 'O novom romane Valentina Kataeva Za vlast' Sovetov', Pravda, 16-17 January 1950. The editor's accompanying note appeared on 16 January.

criticism of the first version of the novel.¹

Bubennov's first stricture concerns the appearance, manner of speech and character of the local Party secretary, Gavrik Chernoiivanenko. He objects to the way in which Kataev fails to take account of the age and dignified position of the hero and continues to call him by his childhood name, Gavrik. More serious is Bubennov's point that Chernoiivanenko is an unsuitable person for the post of Party secretary by virtue of his cold, unfeeling personality (he has never married and eschews all tenderness) and his lack of organisational ability (he allows his men to go underground with insufficient supplies of food and fuel and he recruits unsuitable partisans such as Kolesnichuk and Tsimbal). Finally, his hard-headed, unfeeling attitude suddenly gives way to romantic dreams of his youth when he read about adventures in a cave. He thus approaches the coming struggle with an attitude owing more to adventure stories than to reality.

Secondly, Bubennov objects to Kataev's implications that Chernoiivenenko's group of partisans acted independently of the central Communist Party organisation and that the local Party Committee failed in its duty to provide the group with adequate supplies.

Thirdly, Bubennov contends that in a long novel Kataev devotes too much space to depicting in great detail the everyday lives of the partisans in the catacombs and too little space to their military activities. A related point is what

1. It must be remembered that at this period Party interest in the orthodoxy of literature was at its highest. Very similar to the case of *Za vlast' Sovetov* was that of Fadeev's *Molodaya gvardiya*, which was also re-written in response to criticism.

Bubennov calls Kataev's over-reliance on coincidence and on the recollections of his hero's childhood.

Bubennov's final complaint is against the novel's language, which he finds too colloquial in places and which contains several barbarisms. He ends his review by rebuking the editors of Novyi mir for publishing the novel and expresses the wish that before it is published in a separate edition it will be carefully re-worked.

A few days after the publication of Bubennov's review a letter signed by Kataev appeared in Pravda. In it the author admitted that Bubennov's criticism was 'just and principled' and he promised to re-write the novel radically.¹ He worked for a further eighteen months on Za vlast' Sovetov and a second version appeared in 1951. This time the critics greeted it enthusiastically. Fadeev, who had himself re-written Molodaya gvardiya in similar circumstances, wrote of Kataev's work:

По существу Катаев написал новый роман. Если в первом варианте главными действующими лицами были люди второстепенные, если смотреть на них глазами действительных участников действительной борьбы против румын и немецких оккупантов, развертывавшейся в Одессе, то теперь главными действующими лицами романа, его героями, стали большевики, подпольщики, рядовые участники и руководители одесского подполья и партизанской борьбы против румын и немецких оккупантов.²

The second version of Za vlast' Sovetov differs greatly from the first, most of the changes being in those areas suggested by Bubennov. However, Kataev was not satisfied

1. Pravda, 24 January 1950.

2. A. Fadeev, letter to K. Piskunov (June 1951), published in Za tridtsat' let (M., 1957), pp. 764-5. In this comment Fadeev makes explicit the implication in Bubennov's criticism that characters in works of literature should be judged as real people. See also I. Eventov, 'Delo pisatel'skoi chesti', Zvezda, 1950, No. 6, pp. 172-5.

with the new version, and in 1961 he revised it again for inclusion in the tetralogy Volny Chernogo morya. The third version has a different title (Katakomby), and while Kataev retains some of the revisions made at Bubenov's suggestion, he rejects many others, especially those extra scenes in which the military activity of the partisans was shown. Writing of the changes introduced in the third version he explicitly states that several characters and scenes in the second version were introduced as a result of external pressure and are now rejected by him:

...весь цикл Волны Черного моря - не исторический роман, а чисто лирический, на девять десятых выдуманный. Я бы хотел, чтоб именно так его воспринимали читатели.

Историческую окраску придают роману документы, которые в силу ряда обстоятельств мне приходилось вводить в повествование. Это было требование времени и, не скрою, некоторых редакторов, более настойчивых, чем автор. Мне говорили: - Вы показали одесских партизан в подполье. А как они вели себя "наверху"? И я вписал большую часть - порт - который, как я сейчас понял, вписывать не следовало. У меня, как о свершившемся факте, было сказано, что Одесса взята немцами. Меня спрашивали: "А как это произошло? При каких обстоятельствах?" И я добавил массу лишних подробностей. Роман За власть Советов! был особенно перегружен ненужными деталями, необязательными персонажами. Все это я теперь выбросил. (8,417)¹

Thus the creative history of Za vlast' Sovetov/Katakomby was long and tortuous.² A study of the principal differences between the three versions reveals much about the pressures exerted on the author in the immediate post-war period and about his own uncertainty when composing the work.

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1. Kataev has been inconsistent in the use of an exclamation mark in the title of the novel.
 2. In addition to the three major editions of the novel a post-1956 edition of the second version omitted all references to Stalin.

6.4.3 The Differences between the Versions

The Character of Chernoiivanenko

In the Novyi mir version (version 1) the Party Secretary is referred to throughout as Gavrik, no doubt because in writing the novel Kataev had before him the image of the young hero of Beleet parus odinokii. Following Bubennov's recommendation, Kataev changed this to Chernoiivanenko or Gavriil Semenovich in the 1951 version (version 2), and he retained the more formal name in the 1961 version (version 3), allowing his hero to be called Gavrik only by his childhood friends.

The Gavrik of version 1 has a rather unpleasant face, an irritating high-pitched voice and a peculiar gait, and in his speech he makes frequent use of local Odessan terms. Moreover, he gives the impression of being rootless, almost Bohemian. He has never married, his flat is untidy and he appears to have no recreational interests.¹

All of these features are altered in version 2, in which Chernoiivanenko is a more orthodox Party Secretary. He no longer has such a squeaky voice, and his language has been purged of Odessan exclamations. He is now a widower of many

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1. The character of Gavrik in version 1 was most unusual for a Party Secretary in a novel of the immediate post-war period. A. Yarmolinsky, who has made a study of the Party Secretary in literature of this period, draws the following picture:

The 'partorg' is a virtually ubiquitous literary stereotype. As a rule he is a sturdy, self-assured, well-balanced individual, no Adonis, but of pleasing appearance; a good family man who, in spite of the pressure of his many duties, finds time for home life; and there is apt to be a shelfful of books in his modest but neat lodging. A wise and just man, kindly, but firm, he is the 'Khozyain' (master) of his district, standing 'in loco parentis', as it were to the population...he warns, admonishes, lectures, usually in a spirit of benevolence and humaneness. His membership in the Party elite bestows on him a charismatic power, as it were... On occasion the secretary may be remiss in some respects. In that event he either reforms or is sooner or later replaced by a more nearly ideal specimen.

years standing who remains faithful to the memory of his wife. He lives in a neat little flat with nasturtiums on the window sill. Most important of all, he is no longer someone who idles away his leisure time in reminiscences of childhood but a busy Party worker who still finds time to do serious research into the Anglo-French intervention in Odessa during the Civil War. In version 3 Kataev retained most of the changes to the character of Chernoiivanenko. The only significant difference compared to version 2 is that some of the character's colloquial speech is reintroduced. This has the effect of making Chernoiivanenko's language more colourful without reverting to the vulgar speech of version 1.

Party Control over the Partisans

The most serious of Bubennov's criticisms of the first version was that it gave the impression that Gavrik's band of partisans operated without local or central Party supervision. The decisions which Gavrik takes are purely his own, not those of a higher Party official, and there is no reason to believe that anyone in authority, least of all Stalin, knows of the group's existence. At a time when it was demanded of writers that they show the Party dictating policy, Kataev's novel was clearly unacceptable, and the changes made in this area are radical.

The charge of insularity was answered by the inclusion in the second version of a new episode involving a Party official, Maksimov, from an unoccupied part of the Soviet Union who parachutes into Odessa in order to pass on Party

orders to the resistance workers. His immediate superior is 'Nikita Sergeevich' (Khrushchev), but he hints that Iosif Vissarionovich (Stalin) himself has probably heard of the exploits of the Odessa partisans.

At the thought that they have not been forgotten by the leadership Chernoiivanenko suddenly realises that the war is truly a national one:

- Что вы говорите! Иосиф Виссарионович знает?
- блестя глазами, воскликнул Черноиваненко. И вдруг перед его глазами как бы открылась вся грандиозная картина идущей войны - не просто войны, а войны действительно всенародной, совершенно новой по форме и содержанию, когда сражается каждый человек, где бы он ни был...

...Черноиваненко понял, что в этой новой по содержанию и по форме войне, еще невиданной в истории, он, в сущности является командиром боевого соединения, не менее важного, чем любой завод в тылу или чем любая дивизия на фронте, - частью всенародных вооруженных сил.¹

There are even two scenes in which Stalin appears in person, receiving partisans' representatives in the Kremlin and taking the salute of a May Day parade. (In the latter case the scene is presented through the recollections of little Petya.)

These scenes and all other references to Stalin were removed from post-1956 editions of version 2.

Version 3 retains the meeting between Maksimov and Chernoiivanenko, so there is no return to the spontaneous action of version 1, but Kataev removes all references to political leaders, including Khrushchev.

1. V. Kataev, Za vlast' Sovetov (M., 1955), pp. 356-7.

Additional Scenes of Action

Changes involving the character of the hero and the role of the Party in the war have been retained in all revised versions of the novel because the pressures which caused them to be made are still being exerted in Soviet literature, and probably also because the author felt when he undertook re-writing for the final time that the changes were for the good of the novel. But in the case of the third type of change - the inclusion of more scenes depicting the struggle against the Germans and Rumanians - Kataev has explicitly stated that these scenes were forced on him against his will and better judgement, and they were rejected by him in version 3. One of the extra scenes included in version 2, dealing with the destruction of Odessa's harbour by Lenya Tsimbal and a small group of partisans (version 2, part 2, chapters 12, 13, 22, 23 and 24), was discarded from version 3 but included as a separate story in the collected works. (1,516-46) This fact serves as a clue to Kataev's dissatisfaction with the extra action scenes of version 2. Despite their considerable narrative interest they are essentially self-contained stories grafted on to a novel, and as such they detract from the unity of the work.

The Role of Reminiscence and Coincidence

Version 1 contains many scenes in which Gavrik, Petr Vasil'evich, and Kolesnichuk reminisce about their childhood. These passages are written in the vein of Beleet parus odinokii

and Elektricheskaya mashina, and in a novel set in the 1940s they act as distractions by focussing the reader's attention on an Odessa which existed before the First World War. Kataev himself was aware, at least in retrospect, of the dangers inherent in following Beleet parus odinokii with a novel set almost forty years later in which the young heroes of the earlier work have become adults with responsible positions, for he wrote in 1961:

С моей стороны, разумеется, было рискованно после первой повести сразу написать заключительную, не имея даже черновых набросков середины. Но что поделаешь! Сама жизнь вмешивалась все время в мой замысел, над выполнением которого я в общей сложности проработал двадцать пять лет. (8,410-11)

The obvious danger of which Kataev speaks is that the heroes are separated from their childhood by almost forty years about which the author has not thought, yet he must try to present characters who might have grown out of little Petya and Gavrik. Perhaps because of his close knowledge of Odessa in 1905 and of Petya Bachei and Gavrik Chernoivanenko at that time Kataev makes the adult characters of Za vlast' Sovetov (version 1) reminisce about their boyhood years to an excessive degree. Gavrik recalls hitting Petr Vasil'evich (then little Petya) when both were aged eight; Petr Vasil'evich recalls a day when he and Kolesnichuk played truant to go fishing; even little Petya, who was born in the 1930s, recalls his father's stories of Odessa in the first decade of the twentieth century.¹

1. One critic wrote of this aspect of the work: 'Как это 11-летний мальчик может жить воспоминаниями о воспоминаниях папиного детства!' See T. Korneichuk, 'O detskoj literature', Narodnoe obrazovanie, 1950, No. 1, p. 72.

Through his over-use of reminiscences Kataev appears to regret that his novel is set in the 1940s and not in the period of his own childhood.

Following the criticism of version 1 the role of reminiscences in versions 2 and 3 is greatly reduced. One extended section in which Petr Vasil'evich recalls playing truant when he was a boy is removed from the novel, but retained as a self-contained story in the collected works. (1,502-7) Others are discarded completely, in particular Chernoiivanenko's recollections of childhood (which do not accord with the character of the hero in versions 2 and 3). Between versions 2 and 3 Kataev wrote two more novels about the same characters (Khutorok v stepi and Zimnii veter) and, as a result, version 3 contains more recollections than does 2, but they relate to the heroes' early manhood rather than to their childhood and they do not form extended self-contained stories as in version 1.

Critics such as Bubennov argued that version 1 relied too much on coincidence to be truly realistic. In the subsequent versions Kataev retains the same plot but simplifies the work by re-arranging the chapters into chronological order. Version 1 begins with Petya being thrown overboard when a bomb strikes the ship on which he is travelling and then, in a flashback, Kataev relates how Petya came to be on the ship. In version 2 the story unfolds chronologically. The result is to reduce the melodramatic effect which version 1 produced. Similarly, in version 1 many chapters end on a suspenseful note, often with the use of three dots, and each

chapter consists of very many short paragraphs, some of one line. In re-writing, Kataev avoided the frenetic effect of version 1 by combining several paragraphs, and even several chapters.

6.4.4 Katakomby

Having discussed the major ways in which the three versions of the novel differ from each other it is appropriate now to examine the most important features of the definitive version, i.e. that published in the 1968-72 collected works.

The most notable aspect of the characterisation has already been referred to indirectly in the previous section. It is the uncertainty over whether Bachei and Chernoiivanenko are to be treated as adults or as boys. Thus, Petr Vasil'evich, Gavrik, and Kolesnichuk behave for the most part as typical brave Soviet men who respond immediately to the challenge of war. In this way they resemble the minor characters like Druzhinin, Tulyakov, and Sinichkin-Zheleznyi and the positive heroes of previous works such as Rodion Zhukov and Terentii Chernoiivanenko. An example of the uncomplicated, purely positive characterisation occurs in the chapter describing the outbreak of war:

Петр Васильевич по своему возрасту и по своему довольно видному служебному положению мог бы добиться отсрочки и, вернувшись в Москву, получить броню. Но он предпочел идти на фронт. Он решился на это быстро, без малейших колебаний. Он не мог себе представить, чтобы можно было поступить иначе. (6,306)

But occasionally these brave Soviet citizens become once again the children of almost forty years earlier. In other words,

Kataev attempts to render his characters more complex by drawing on his earlier novel Beleet parus odinokii. The scene in which Petr Vasil'evich meets his former teacher Afrikan Afrikanich and recalls a classroom incident, or that in which Motya shows the old photographs to Petya serve as examples of this device. In the case of Kolesnichuk, Kataev uses a type of semi-direct speech to suggest the character's naivety (especially in the extended episode involving the Rumanian Ionel Mirya) while simultaneously presenting him as a brave Soviet patriot. The attempt to create complex characters in this manner results in a division between the heroic face and the childishly naive face of the central adult heroes.¹

It might be expected in view of Kataev's success with child characters in previous works that Petya and Valentina would be drawn with more subtlety than the adult figures, but in this novel Kataev fails to convince with his young heroes. The reason is not hard to find. Whereas Kataev knew the Petya Bachei of Beleet parus odinokii intimately, he does not know the Soviet boy so well, and he attempts to fill the gaps in his knowledge by referring to the childhood of Petya's father in the Odessa of 1905-10. For example, when he is shown a photograph of Motya as a child he reacts as emotionally as his father, who knew her at that age, would have done:

Он еще раз посмотрел на нее, на карточку и опять увидел неотразимое сходство. На этот раз он

1. It is interesting to note the reaction of one young reader to the personality of Chernoiivanenko: 'Сама не знаю почему, но Гаврика маленького я вижу ясно, как живого, и очень дружу с ним, а Гаврика большого (Гавриила Семеновича Черноиваненко) сразу забыла, хотя по той большой роли, которую он играет в романе, его не следовало бы забывать.' Comment by Elena K. quoted by B. Brainina, 'O nekotorykh osobennostyakh...', p. 362.

совершенно ясно увидел, почуствовал, что маленькая девочка в выгоревшем ситцевом платице на выгоревшем любительском снимке и эта пожилая добрая женщина - один и тот же человек, связанный с ним, с Петей, непонятной силой и светом какой-то очень давней, вечной любви. (6,414)¹

By means of such passages Kataev attempts to introduce into a novel on a contemporary theme the atmosphere of a distant Odessa which he loves and surrounds with a golden haze of nostalgia.

The novel's setting suffers from a similar fault to the characterisation in that the author seems less interested in depicting Odessa in the 1940s than in the early part of the century. As with the characters, he understands the modern town less thoroughly than he does the town in which he lived as a boy. When Petr Vasil'evich returns to Odessa after the defeat of his battery, the sight of the modern town under occupation reminds him of the town in which he lived as a boy, and as he stands at a busy crossroads he recalls the moneychangers who once traded on the same site:

Но это были не простые, обычные деньги. Это были иностранные деньги, почему-то называвшиеся валюта и обладавшие в высшей степени странной, даже как бы зловещей способностью при размене изменять свою стоимость. То они стоили дороже, то они вдруг стоили дешевле. Тогда мальчику Пете, будущему Петру Васильевичу, казалось, что это не деньги, не серебряные кружочки монет, а сами государства со всеми своими эмблемами, гербами и профилями монархов мелькают и тасуются на зеленой крышке рундука только для того, чтобы часть их богатства осталась в этих сухих, хищных руках с проворными кривыми пальцами. (6,509-10)

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1. Another (equally sentimental) example occurs in a section which was included in the draft of the first version but later excluded from the novel, and published only in 1961. It concerns the Moldavian hero Kotovskii. 'Но Котовский папиного детства был легендарный всадник, несущийся на своем взмыленном скакуне в дыму и пламени степных пожаров вдоль бессарабских обрывов, вдоль моря, по которому, как призрак революции, метался легендарный броненосец "Потемкин". Котовский и "Потемкин" стояли рядом в мире папиного детства.' V. Kataev, 'Vospominaniya' (unpublished extract from *Za vlast' Sovetov*), *Sovetskaya Moldaviya*, 29 November 1961.

The fact that, in writing Za vlast' Sovetov/Katakomby, Kataev was re-tracing his literary steps can be seen in many features of the novel. The influence of Beleet parus odinokii has already been discussed, but it is by no means the only earlier work to be echoed in Za vlast' Sovetov. In one chapter alone there are faint echoes of Rodion Zhukov (in the way in which Petr Vasil'evich returns to Odessa from Akkerman); of Kataev's First World War sketches (in the surname Uilier, which was the name of one of the soldiers that he knew) and of Otche nash (in the episode where Petr Vasil'evich is forced to keep walking through the city):

Петр Васильевич с утра ходил по Одессе, занятой неприятелем, стараясь дважды не появиться в одних и тех же местах. Он без устали ходил из улицы в улицу, пересекая город в разных направлениях, и не находил места, где бы можно было остановиться и отдохнуть. Всюду было одинаково ненадежно. (6,376)

It is tempting to postulate the hypothesis that when faced with the unfamiliar subject of the partisans' struggle in occupied Odessa Kataev turned to his previous work to provide some inspiration, just as, when writing Ya, syn trudovogo naroda, he had turned to his First World War sketches and to Gogol'.

The outstanding stylistic feature of Za vlast' Sovetov/Katakomby is the use of striking detail to encapsulate a scene. Thus, the incident in which Druzhinin, Svyatoslav, and Valentina are marched through the city on their way to torture and execution remains in the memory for the detail (used almost symbolically) of the white acacia twig which Valentina holds in her mouth:

Был конец мая. По всему городу цвела белая акация. Старые большие деревья, сплошь увешанные плакучими гроздьями нежных, необыкновенно душистых зеленовато-молочных цветов, превращали улицы изуродованного города в аллеи, в тенистые туннели цветов и листьев... Откуда-то с балкона им бросили охапку цветущей акации. Одна веточка упала на голову Валентины, зацепилась за волосы, но не удержалась и стала сползать вниз. Девушка поймала ее на лице скованными руками и взяла в рот. Так она и шла, с веточкой белой акации в губах, почти черных, как маленькая запекшаяся рана, слегка опираясь плечом на Святослава. (6,585)

Similarly, the privations of life in the catacombs are thrown into relief by the poetic detail of the snowflake which falls into the well and is caught by Valentina. (6,424)

The novel contains a number of lyrical nature descriptions, the most notable of which comes in the chapter entitled 'Ogni Kassiopei', when Petr Vasil'evich recalls a night in his youth spent on the sea shore with a girl. Two lines from a poem run through his mind. The lyricism of the nature description and Kataev's poem of 1918 is contrasted with the activity of Druzhinin, who is attempting to call Moscow on the radio. Thus the beauty of nature, poetry, and youthful love heightens the incongruity of invasion and occupation by enemy forces. A similar effect is achieved by the emotional and lyrical description of Moscow in the second chapter. As in Zhena, Kataev's approach to the theme of war consists in juxtaposing scenes of peace and happiness with scenes of war which suddenly, and totally unexpectedly, interrupts the peaceful lives of his characters.

Whereas during and immediately after the Civil War Kataev had written stories about young men for whom life was a joy irrespective of the great social upheaval, for whom, in

other words, private life remained fundamentally untouched by war and politics, he now presents war as an unbearable intrusion which must be ended as soon as possible if life is to be happy again. During the Civil War Kataev's heroes contained the seeds of happiness within themselves (in their youth, good health, love, and poetry), but now happiness depends on social stability and peace. The change in attitude may reflect a difference in age, since the philosophy behind such stories of the Civil War period as Chelovek s uzlom and Zheleznoe kol'tso relies largely on youth and health; but more than that, it reflects the growing importance of the public element in Kataev's work. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s Kataev's work touches time and time again on the interdependence of the private and public spheres of life. In this respect Za vlast' Sovetov/Katakomby continues the philosophy of Ya, syn trudovogo naroda and Zhena (and, to a lesser extent, Vremya, vpered!).

6.5 Kataev as a Public Figure in the 1940s

In Za vlast' Sovetov/Katakomby one can see faint traces of Kataev the pupil of Bunin, but these have been subordinated to the need to produce a work which would be acceptable in the Zhdanov period of Soviet literature. It would be a mistake to suggest that at this time Kataev curbed his natural inclination as a writer entirely unwillingly. His many publicistic writings and the role he played in public life during the 1940s indicate his wish to conform to the demands of the age. In 1947 he was awarded the Order of Lenin and in the same year elected

to the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR by voters of the Shcherbakovskii region of Moscow. It is significant that in one of his election addresses to the voters he should stress that he considers himself to be a Soviet writer, and moreover, that he should suggest that it was Mayakovskii who taught him the importance of being a committed Soviet author. A newspaper report of his speech contains the following passage:

Много лет назад из одного заграничного клуба литераторы прислали мне письмо с приглашением посетить их. По молодости я был весьма польщен этим и показывал приглашение всем своим знакомым. При встрече с В.В. Маяковским показал письмо и ему, но тот очень холодно выслушал меня, потом небрежно достал из кармана пиджака точно такое же приглашение и сказал:

- Ну, что вы хвастаетесь? Чем тут хвастаться? И вообще запомните: Если вас знают, если вас приглашают, то только потому, что вы советский писатель. Понятно?¹

The conclusion is unavoidable that in his literary work of the period Kataev attempts to be a Soviet author, thus shifting the balance towards the figure of Mayakovskii and away from Bunin. Yet even in Za vlast' Sovetov the aspects of Kataev's work which he learned originally from Bunin do not disappear. During the next two decades they were to play an increasingly important role.

6.6 Editor of Yunost'

Between 1951, which saw the publication of the second version of Za vlast' Sovetov, and 1961, when the tetralogy was completed with Zimnii veter, Kataev published very little new

1. 'Pisatel'-boets', Krasnaya zvezda, 19 January 1947.

work. From 1953 to 1956 he worked on the second part of the tetralogy, Khutorok v stepi, which appeared in time for the Twentieth Party Congress in 1956, but that apart, Kataev's most important work during the decade was as editor of the new journal Yunost' which he helped to found. The idea of editing a new journal for a predominantly young readership appealed greatly to Kataev, and he spent much time and energy on the venture.¹ Within a short time Yunost' became the forum for many talented young writers and critics and it soon became the leading literary monthly in terms of the number of copies sold. In a tribute to Kataev's editorship, the journal's second editor, Boris Polevoi, has written:

Он загорелся этой идеей, быстро сумел стянуть к себе талантливых интересных людей, зажечь их своим огнем, и в короткое время под его руководством молодой, только что созданный журнал встал на ноги и в первые же годы своего существования завоевал симпатии юной аудитории и далеко обогнал по тиражу все существующие литературно-художественные ежемесячники. И, что мне кажется самым главным, Катаев сумел уже в те годы на страницах этого журнала открыть для советских читателей немалую плеяду юных писателей, поэтов, критиков, публицистов.²

Among the authors and poets who published their early work in Yunost' are Vasilii Aksenov, Anatolii Kuznetsov, Anatolii Gladilin, Evgenii Evtushenko, Andrei Voznesenskii. Kataev's patronage of young writers in the 1950s dictated the form of his address at the Third Congress of Soviet Writers in 1959, when he devoted the whole of his speech to the work of the young, mentioning in particular, Kuznetsov, Gladilin and Viktor Moskovkin.³

1. See 'S chem my prikhodim k s'ezdu', Trud, 15 December 1954.

2. B. Polevoi, 'Master s bol'shoi bukvy', Literaturnaya Rossiya, 27 January 1967. Polevoi goes on to say that many of the young authors who were first published in Yunost' when Kataev was editor recall those days with great affection.

3. V. Kataev, 'Pero zhar-ptitsy', Literaturnaya gazeta, 22 May 1959.

6.7 Khutorok v stepi

Appropriately, Khutorok v stepi was first published in Yunost' (1956 Nos. 1, 2, 3). It is set in the years 1910-1912, beginning with the death of Tolstoi and ending with the Lena massacre. As in Beleet parus odinokii Kataev attempts to integrate the themes of the growth of revolutionary awareness in the nation and the personal and political development of Petya Bachei who is now aged 13 - 15. However, the parallel private and public strands remain unintegrated, and the construction is much more laboured than that of the earlier novel. The work divides into two sections, the first of which deals with the death of Tolstoi, the consequent sacking of Vasilii Petrovich, his employment by Faig, and a lengthy description of a trip round Europe undertaken by Bachei and his sons; and the second of which is mainly concerned with the revolutionary activities of Zhukov, Terentii, and Gavrik and the way in which the Bacheis become drawn into them.

6.7.1 Genesis of the Novel

As had happened with Za vlast' Sovetov and Ya, syn trudovogo naroda Kataev here uses two very different sources for his novel - his own recollections of his childhood (including the journey to Switzerland via Turkey, Greece, and Italy which he and his father and brother undertook in 1910 and the poems which he had written between 1910 and 1916); and historical accounts and documents relating to the principal revolutionary events of the years 1910-1912 such as the Sixth

All-Russian Party Conference and the appearance of Pravda. As with the earlier novels, the result is a clash between the two.

Several chapters, mainly involving Petya, must be considered highly successful artistically, but these chapters all have the features of the short story and they stand out in the novel as exceptions. A good example is Chapter seven in which the main protagonist is Gavrik. This chapter is reminiscent of some of Olesha's autobiographical stories such as Ya smotryu v proshloe or V mire and it anticipates Kataev's own Razbitaya zhizn', which is a collection of such self-contained incidents. The atmosphere of Odessa near the beginning of the century with its burgeoning technology is captured in the descriptions of the early cinemas, called sinematografy or illyuziony. The chapter conveys little information about Gavrik and it contributes hardly anything to the development of the plot. Like many chapters in Beleet parus odinokii it is almost purely digressive. But as a self-contained story it is of considerable interest for its picture of one aspect of life in 1910. Similarly Chapter nine stands on its own as a successful short story about the obsession which forces Petya and Gavrik to eat a whole jar of strawberry jam which they had only intended to sample. Here Kataev convincingly sketches the character of Petya - self-important in his role as teacher and host - but the picture of Gavrik does not accord with his role elsewhere in the novel. The requirements of the novel as a whole are secondary to those

of this chapter in the matter of the character's psychology. Finally, several of the chapters dealing with the foreign travel also give the impression of being isolated incidents which make suitable short stories rather than chapters in an extended narrative. The dominating principle in the construction is, therefore, a historical narrative which loosely connects the novel but which is in conflict with the short story principle, evident in many of the chapters.

For some of the foreign scenes and for the scenes on the farm Kataev had recourse to his own early poems. The most obvious use of an early poem in Khutorok v stepi occurs with 'Znoi' which is paraphrased and incorporated in its entirety in the novel. The other poems in the cycle Stikhi s khutorka were also used to remind Kataev of the sensuous details of a hot summer at the cottage. The walk in the steppe with Marina in the fourth chapter recalls the poem 'Noch' trevozhna', which contains the stanza:

Улыбнулась - Выйдем, что ли
За курганы, к морю, в поле?
- К морю, в поле? Выйдем. Что же,
Небо в звездных переливах
Звезды в тучах и на нивах
Серебристо льется рожь.¹

The expectation of rain which will end the enervating hot spell occurs first in the poem 'Sukhovei'. The sounds which Petya hears as he waits at night to see Marina are those described in 'Vecher' (1915). The novel contains the following lines: 'В монастыре на 16-й станции призывно звонили к вечерне. Далеко в степи слышалось печальное пение косарей.' (5,501)

1. V. Kataev, 'Noch' trevozhna', Odesskii listok, 17 July 1915.

The poem begins:

В монастыре звонят к вечерне,
Поют работницы в саду. (9,547)

The poem 'Stambul' (published in 1916) is used as the source for some of the details of Istanbul in the novel, in particular the description of the lightning illuminating Hagia Sophia.¹ The homesickness experienced by Petya towards the end of the journey was evidently also experienced by Kataev and expressed in a poem and prose poem of 1912:

Когда на красоту природы
Твоей, Италия, гляжу -
Восторга слов не нахожу,
Лимонных рощ прохладный сумрак,
Томящий эной твоих ночей...
Но мне - всей прелести² твоей
Равнины русские милей.

6.7.2 Characters

The 'positive' characters in Khutorok v stepi, Rodion Zhukov, Terentii Chernoiivanenko and Gavrik, are as lacking in individual traits as are all such figures in Kataev's works. Whereas in Beleet parus odinokii Gavrik was drawn with a certain degree of insight (deriving from Kataev's own recollection of the sensuous awareness of an eight-year-old child), in the later novel such insight is reserved for the portrait of Petya, and Gavrik plays a conventional 'heroic' role similar to that of Terentii.

Apart from a cameo portrait of Pavlik similar to that in Beleet parus odinokii the main interest as far as the

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1. V. Kataev, 'Stambul', Yuzhnaya mysl', 10 April 1916.
 2. V. Kataev, 'Kogda na krasotu prirody', Odesskii vestnik, 1912, No.4, p.2. See also a prose poem comparing the grandeur of the Swiss landscape with the less striking but much loved landscape of Russia. 'U ozera v Shveitsarii', Odesskii vestnik, 1912, No. 25, p. 2.

characters are concerned lies in the portraits of Petya and Vasilii Petrovich. The principal features of Petya's personality develop naturally from those in Beleet parus odinokii, but Kataev has attempted successfully to allow for the character's greater age in the later novel. Thus Petya is once again portrayed as introspective, bookish, impressionable and easily infatuated. On board the ship he spends most of his time alone, lost in his daydreams: 'Петя целые часы проводил на палубе, мечтательно подставив грудь в своей фланельке и полосатой тельняшке под широкий черноморский ветер.' (5,342)

He frequently imagines himself to be the hero of a work of literature, and whereas in Beleet parus odinokii his heroes were the lone adventurers Robinson Crusoe and the characters of Mayne Reid, he now aspires to be a passionate lover and he casts around among the works of Pushkin, Turgenev, Lermontov, and Goncharov for suitable heroes. In Interlaken he persuades Vasilii Petrovich to buy him an alpenstock and a woollen cloak which he wears 'in the Spanish manner', with a corner thrown over one shoulder. He is enchanted by the wild mountain scenery, especially during bad weather:

Весь облепленный снегом, со снежинками на бровях и ресницах, Петя стоял, скрестив на груди руки, в развевающемся плаще и с мрачным упованием думал о маленькой девочке, которую так безжалостно с ним разлучили и увезли в Париж, в Лонжюмо. (5,405)

Petya's adolescence, with its typical posing and self-induced melancholy, is sympathetically handled by Kataev. Only when he attempts to describe the effect of the emigres on Petya's political consciousness does the portrait lack subtlety, and

become akin to the portrait of Gavrik.

The principal virtues of the characterisation of Petya are firstly Kataev's vivid memory of the feelings of an adolescent boy and the boy's perception of the physical world, and secondly the mixture of warm affection and irony with which the author approaches his character. The first of these has already been dealt with in some detail with regard to the younger Petya of Beleet parus odinokii. The author's irony is revealed both directly, through the contrast between Petya's affectations and Kataev's comments, and indirectly by means of other characters or the use of semi-direct speech. An example of the former method comes in the episode where Petya quotes Lermontov, but spoils the effect by the tone of his voice: 'А что такое - любить? - разочарованно сказал Петя и не совсем кстати, с легким завыванием процитировал: - "Любить? Но на время не стоит труда, а вечно любить невозможно!".'

(5,452) Perhaps the best example of the use of other characters to mock Petya's romantic posing is the various attitudes towards Petya's cloak and alpenstock of which he is so proud. Gavrik pays no attention to them except to suggest that Petya must be too hot in the cloak, whereas for Motya the alpenstock is a 'stick with a tip'. Kataev frequently makes use of semi-direct speech, usually to convey his own ironical attitude to Petya:

Марина по-прежнему не появлялась, и Петя мысленно ее упрекал, даже называл обманщицей, как будто бы она ему что-то обещала. Потом он решил ее наказать презрением и больше не обращать на нее внимания. Он заставил себя за целый день ни разу не посмотреть в сторону флигельна. Это было, конечно, с его стороны слишком жестоко, но ничего не поделаешь. Пусть она знает, на что он способен, если его обманывают. Пусть пеняет на себя... (5,495-6)

As in the case of Petya, the character of Vasilii Petrovich loses its subtlety only when Kataev insists on his political education. The pastoral scene at the end of the novel in which Vasilii Petrovich lectures to assembled workers in return for their labour in gathering in his cherries breaks the verisimilitude of the characterisation, although Kataev tries to prepare for it by remarking on Vasilii Petrovich's latent Rousseauism during the visit to Switzerland. For the rest, Vasilii Petrovich is portrayed sympathetically and convincingly as a principled, dignified democrat whose pedagogical manner spills over from his professional to his family life. Kataev had portrayed a similar character, based on his own father, several times before, notably in Otets. One chapter of Khutorok v stepi ('Panikhida') leans heavily on the short story of 1922, but it is significant that whereas Sinaiskii's father gave the priest money hesitantly but with a sincere, firm handshake, in the novel the entire incident has unpleasant overtones. By small changes Kataev suggests the priest's lack of interest in the ceremony and Vasilii Petrovich's sudden insight into its falseness.

6.7.3 Concluding Remarks

Khutorok v stepi intermittently reveals the same gifts which Kataev had shown in Beleet parus odinokii, but it lacks the charm and atmosphere of the earlier novel. Its political message is crude and unintegrated, and it relies too much upon earlier inspiration such as that which had given rise to Kataev's early poems, to Otets, and to Beleet parus odinokii.

itself. Yet once again it demonstrates Kataev's attempt to bring together two very different elements, and in this lies its main interest in the context of Kataev's work as a whole. The poetry which Kataev had written under Bunin's direct influence in the second decade of the century is here reworked and incorporated into a novel which also contains the simple political message which had been present in Kataev's work since the 1930s. As a result the novel lacks unity of inspiration. The two elements which the author wishes to incorporate remain widely separate, and the attempt to write a personal, poetic novel which would also be historical, fails.

6.8 Zimnii veter

Zimnii veter, on which Kataev worked at the end of the 1950s and which was published in 1961, is set in Odessa during 1917. Chronologically it thus occupies third place in Kataev's tetralogy, and there is a sense in which it must be seen as the most significant of the four novels, for it depicts the hero at the most important moment of his life.

As a result of a light wound received during the summer offensive of 1917 Petya Bachei is sent to Odessa to recuperate. Petya enjoys the opportunity of flirting with the many girls who visit him in hospital, but he soon becomes involved in a more serious affair with Irina, the daughter of General Zarya-Zaryanitskii. Engrossed in his love affair, Petya takes no part in the Revolution which sweeps over Odessa, but his old friends Gavrik and Marina, now married, play an important role in the Bolshevik victory. Petya eventually joins the Red Army

as commander of an armoured train, forgetting for a while his passion for Irina. During a counter-revolution, led by Irina's father, both Marina and Petya's brother Pavlik are killed. At their final meeting in wintry Odessa it becomes clear to Petya and Irina that they have become enemies and she attempts to shoot him, but he escapes. The novel ends with a deliberate reference to the ending of Beleet parus odinokii. As the invading German armies take over the city the Bolsheviki, including Terentii, Rodion Zhukov, Gavrik, and now Petya, are forced to flee in a small boat in order to continue the struggle from afar.

6.8.1 Construction

The construction of the novel follows the pattern of earlier works in the tetralogy, and with the completion of the entire cycle it can be seen that the common construction of all four novels derives from Kataev's approach to the historical novel and, indeed, from the entire nature of his creative talent. Zimnii veter divides into two sections, the second of which begins with the introduction of Gavrik and Marina as characters at the end of the nineteenth chapter. In the first part attention focuses almost exclusively on Petya, and Kataev gives a detailed account of his wounding, his return to Odessa (including his misadventure at Yassi),¹

1. The incident in which Petya is arrested and held overnight under threat of death for a speech which he makes condemning the war is apparently based on a misadventure which befell Kataev in 1917. In an interview with the correspondent of Sovetskaya Moldaviya he describes the incident thus: 'Вы помните в романе Зимний ветер случай, когда солдаты освобождают арестованного казаками прапорщика Петю Бачвя? Так вот, этот случай был со мной, и не под Яссами, как сказано в книге, а в молдавском городе Оргееве в 1917г. Там мы стояли, продвигаясь с маршевой ротой на фронт. Я жил тогда на квартире у владельца

/Contd. on next page ...

his recuperation in hospital, and his romantic involvement with the Zarya-Zaryanitskii family. This part of the novel develops at a leisurely pace, and the rumbling threats of social upheaval remain in the background. Then from Chapter twenty onwards events move very swiftly, and description gives way to narration of those events; the enclosed world of Petya's private concerns opens out and he is seen in the context of wider historical issues.

In Beleet parus odinokii, Khutorok v stepi and, to a lesser extent, Katakomby, a similar method of construction is used. For the first half of Beleet parus odinokii Kataev concentrates on the private concerns of his hero, recording the way in which he apprehends and reacts to the physical world around him. Then, in the second half the work broadens out to encompass the revolutionary activity in Odessa in 1905, and the pace simultaneously quickens. Similarly, the first half of Khutorok v stepi deals with the European journey undertaken by the Bachei family, and only in the second half does the focus shift towards socio-political events of the period. Finally, the early chapters of Katakomby establish the private lives of Petr Vasil'evich and his family and friends before the intrusion of war.

It would appear an inescapable conclusion that Kataev's intention in all four parts of the cycle is to reveal

(Note 1 contd. from previous page)

местной аптеки. Как-то я стоял со своими солдатами на улице и, увидев конных казаков, высказал нелестные слова в адрес этих усмирителей. Вечером меня арестовали на квартире и переправили в штаб, где я ночевал под усиленным караулом. Утром меня освободили солдаты нашей роты, поднявшие на ноги весь оргеевский гарнизон.' A. Rozhnov, 'V gostyakh u Valentina Kataeva', Sovetskaya Moldaviya, 22 November 1961.

the relationship between the life of the individual, with his purely private concerns, and the state of society in general. The early sections of all four novels are more successful than the later ones because in the former Kataev writes from his own experience of the physical world, whereas in the latter his observations are based on received knowledge, and the author's publicistic intention results in schematic characterisation and the use of a rhetorical style which often strikes a dissonant chord compared with the early passages. In the binary construction of all four parts of Volny Chernogo morya can be seen that split in his creative personality which Kataev described in Trava zabven'ya and which accounts for so much in his entire output.

6.8.2 Characters

The theme of Zimnii veter derives from the same aspect of Kataev's personality. It is the need to choose between serving the Revolution and following purely private pursuits which, in the end, may prove to be an anti-revolutionary path. Marina expresses this notion when she asks Petya:

Ну, а вы? Что вы? - спросила она с оживлением:-
В этом вопросе заключалось все.

Петя понял. Ему стало не по себе. Что он мог ответить?

- Ничего. Живу, - ответил он с неловкой улыбкой.

- Но все же? настойчиво сказала Марина - Вы с ним?

Он понял, что она спрашивает о его политических убеждениях.

Ответить было очень трудно. Вернее, даже невозможно. (6,159)

Like Semen Kotko, the hero of Ya, syn trudovogo naroda, Petya Bachei returns home from the First World War wishing to

enjoy the pleasures which peace and his home offer and unwilling to risk his life again. Only after the return to Odessa of Gavrik does Petya realize the need to fight for the Revolution. The issue is a fundamental one for Kataev, and it stands at the centre of much of his later work. In Zimnii veter, however, he simplifies the question by making the Zarya-Zaryanitskiis unprincipled scoundrels and Gavrik, Terentii, and the other Bolsheviks morally faultless.

Of the characters in Zimnii veter only Petya and, to a lesser extent, Vasilii Petrovich, are presented with any degree of complexity, but Kataev's achievement with Petya exceeds anything else in adult characterisation in the tetralogy. In some respects Petya recalls the heroes of Kataev's early short stories Baraban and A and B v kvadrate in that he attaches more importance to the immediate problems of life, including love affairs, than to their wider context. His egoism, vanity and slight vulgarity emerge in his relations with Motya and the other girls with whom he is keen to flirt. Cushioned from the real world by the comfort and safety of the military hospital, he becomes entirely self-centred. When his aunt visits him in the hospital she asks:

- Чего же ты в таком случае хочешь?
- Жить, тетечна, жить.
- Дорогой мы все хотим жить. Но как? Как ты хочешь жить? От того, как ты намерен дальше жить, быть может, зависит судьба России. (6,74)

Yet this poshlyak (as his aunt calls him) is portrayed with great sympathy and humour by Kataev. His pretensions, such as wearing his insignia and medals, are treated with ironical amusement by the author, and thereby turned in favour

of the character. Moreover, whereas the optimistic passivity of Kataev's heroes of the 1920s was a basic characteristic, in Petya it is a temporary dream-like state from which he eventually awakens. At the beginning of the novel his impulsive behaviour in Yassi indicates the path he will eventually follow.

Another respect in which the characterisation of Petya Bachei represents a return to Kataev's methods of the 1920s is the use of delirium as a device for the introduction of fantasy. For example, in his delirious condition Petya gives a form to the word 'gangrene':

Ему представлялось это страшное слово "гангрена" в виде медленно ползущего длинного животного, покрытого черными пятнами с желтовато-розовыми краями, причем это животное в то же время было также его онемевшим бедром. (6,22)¹

The similarities in characterisation between Zimnii veter and Kataev's best stories of the 1920s must not be exaggerated (for instance the author is much kinder to his characters than in, say, Otets), but they do show that at the beginning of the 1960s Kataev was prepared to reintroduce into his work some of the elements which had distinguished it at a much earlier stage and which had, of necessity, been omitted throughout the period of Socialist Realism. In this respect Zimnii veter acts as a bridge between Kataev's work of the 1920s and that mauvisme which was to be his manner of writing for most of the 1960s.

1. Compare this with Ser Genri i chert (1,173-82).

6.8.3 Concluding Remarks

The tetralogy Volny Chernogo morya occupied most of Kataev's attention for over twenty years, but on the whole, it must be regarded as an artistic failure. Kataev is not ideally equipped as a novelist, and it is significant that having completed his tetralogy he has never returned to the novel form, preferring in recent years the short story or a free style of writing which gives scope for his particular strengths and which cannot be classified readily under any existing genre.¹

1. In his work of the 1960s Kataev frequently muses on his uncertainty over the genre he is using. See especially Malen'kaya zheleznaya dver' v stene and Kubik.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The 'New' Kataev

7.1 Malen'kaya zheleznaya dver' v stene

The work which was felt by most critics to herald the arrival of the 'new' Kataev was Svyatoi kolodets, but it was preceded by Malen'kaya zheleznaya dver' v stene, a short work about Lenin on Capri and in Paris which introduced many of the themes and devices which were to run through Kataev's work for the rest of the 1960s and into the 1970s.

The genre of Malen'kaya zheleznaya dver' v stene is difficult to define, as Kataev indicates:

Тема Ленина огромна, необъятна, а эта книга не исторический очерк, не роман, даже не рассказ. Это размышления, страницы путевых тетрадей, воспоминания, точнее всего - лирический дневник, не больше. Но и не меньше. (9,7)

The 'lyrical diary' and memoir literature flourished during the 1960s (among the best examples are Berggol'ts's Dnevnye zvezdy, Paustovskii's Povest' o zhizni, and Erenburg's Lyudi, gody, zhizn') but Malen'kaya zheleznaya dver' v stene, together with Kataev's work later in the decade, is distinguished from most other examples of 'lyrical diary' by its complexity.¹

The skeleton of the tale is provided by an account, based in part on the memoirs of contemporaries and in part on imagination, of the activities of Lenin on Capri and in Paris. Although the work is written without chapter divisions and with little regard for a connected narrative in the conventional sense, Lenin's life in Paris is described by means of five major incidents, namely: his two visits to Gor'kii's house

1. In the 1960s, as at other times in his career, Kataev's work forms part of a common trend in Soviet literature.

on Capri, his daily bicycle journey across Paris to the Bibliothèque Nationale, his visits to the theatre, his interest in aviation, and his friendship with the Lafargues (including his oration at their funeral). In addition, the historical associations of the Paris Commune are never far from Lenin's mind, and form a sixth element in his Parisian life.

However, while the figure of Lenin acts as a focal point for what narration there is in Malen'kaya zheleznaya dver' v stene, the work clearly amounts to much more than an account of five or six aspects of the revolutionary leader's life in exile. Kataev's approach to the subject of Lenin is disclosed on the first page: 'И подобно тому, как Арагон сказал: "Робеспьер - мой сосед", мне хочется сказать: "Ленин - мой современник".' (9,7)

Kataev's interest in Lenin is, primarily, as a great contemporary, and the point of view, which often appears to be that of Lenin, almost invariably belongs to Kataev himself. We see Capri and Paris through the eyes of the author. It is no coincidence that the areas of Lenin's life imaginatively explored by Kataev are almost all areas in which he can share the leader's experiences. He, too, knew Capri and Paris; he was fascinated by that city's architecture and topography; he had been to its theatres; he recalled vividly his own excitement at the wonder of manned flight in the early years of the century. Thus, one can superimpose on the narrative skeleton of the work another in which the central figure is the author himself and which is digressive. At times the

two diverge widely, but for the most part they fit closely together, accounting for the fluid alternation between narration and digression which characterises Malen'kaya zheleznaya dver' v stene. Many of the paragraphs involving Lenin are introduced by a phrase such as 'I see' or 'I can imagine' which enables Kataev to retain a central place, even in narrative. He never effaces himself.

...Удивительно ясно представляется мне апрельское утро на Напри, пристань, а за ней в несколько ярусов розовые, лиловые, голубые, палевые, малиновые домики, как живая мозаика, отраженные в мелких волнах под сходными только что прибывшего из Неаполя пароходика. Вижу в толпе Максима Горького, худого, сутулого - желтые усы вниз - в круглой широкополой вызывающе-демократической шляпе, а рядом с ним небольшого ростом непреклонного крепыша Ленина в новом костюме, сшитом в Женеве, и в твердом котелке на голове. (9,13)

The centrality of the author accounts for the wide range of material covered in the work, for he gives free expression to his eclectic tastes and interests, often ascribing them to Lenin.

Но бывало, что ему приходилось идти по мосту Александра 111. Вижу, как он идет по этому новому, сравнительно недавно открытому мосту шинарно буржуазного стиля - триумф дурного вкуса - mauvais goût. В городе Нотр-Дама и Сен-Шапель, Лувра и Консьержери этот мост выглядел бы чудовищно, если бы Париж не был повсеместно заражен подобной же эклектикой конца века, этим "стиль сан стиль", к которому с течением времени привыкли. Он стал необходимой принадлежностью буржуазного Парижа. (9,111)

The central figure in the book is, then, the author himself and the theme which emerges is that of the author and time. The year before beginning work on Malen'kaya zheleznaya dver' v stene Kataev had said of younger writers: 'Прежде всего им нужно выразить себя в искусстве, потому что именно

в этой потребности - рассказать о времени и о себе - заключается существо нашего писательского ремесла.¹ If Kataev speaks about himself in his tale of Lenin in Paris, he also speaks about time, or rather, times - for he ranges freely through the store of his memory, setting down incidents from various periods without regard to chronological order.

The strange title of the work relates to its basic theme, being drawn from the most important scene in which Kataev and his wife visit an aeronautical museum situated in the middle of a wood in a Parisian suburb. The scene is at once realistic (it is brilliantly narrated) and symbolic, and the little iron door in the wall opens to reveal, on the one hand, a museum of old aircraft and, on the other hand, the author's past. In stepping through the little door he steps back into his own youth. It seems likely that the title refers to H.G. Wells's short story The Door in the Wall in which a successful politician is haunted throughout his life by the recollection of a childhood experience of great beauty when he had stumbled upon a mysterious door in a wall and entered a garden in which he had felt incomparably happy. This mystical experience is essentially related to childhood, and during his busy life Wells's hero never allows himself time to recapture it by stepping through the door in the wall. In Malen'kaya zheleznaya dver' v stene Kataev does allow himself to experience once again certain memorable moments from his past life, and he recalls them with such sensuous

1. V. Kataev, 'Pero zhar-ptitsy', Literaturnaya gazeta, 22 May 1959.

clarity that they appear to be taking place now. Significantly, in the wood in which the little iron door in the wall is situated Kataev half expects to meet Oberon with his magic horn. (9,107) Oberon's magic power consists in being able to transport himself instantly to any place and any time, and it is a power which Kataev comes increasingly to claim for himself, through his art, in the 1960s and 1970s.¹ Malen'kaya zheleznaya dver' v stene contains several passages in which Kataev claims that time ceases to exist for him. For example:

Ни с чем не сравнимое сладкое ощущение потери времени, вернее, его смещения...Все чаще и чаще оно преследует меня теперь, на склоне лет. Вижу Напри таким, каким он был пятьдесят лет тому назад, в один знойный июльский день 1910 года, и Ленина, скачками идущего вниз по крутой скалистой дороге, мимо исполинских агав и кактусов к бухте Марина-Пинкола, где он любил купаться. (9,77)²

Once freed from the demands of sequential time (which normally dictates the form of a story) Kataev is able to range widely, from the Odessa of his childhood to Paris in the 1930s, Capri in 1910, Paris in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The stimulus to a change of time and scene is provided partly by the narrative about Lenin and partly by free association. At times it appears that this method leads to an undisciplined structure, as in the following extract in which Kataev records the train of his thought, laying bare the associations between one subject and another:

1. The subtitle of Razbitaya zhizn' is Volshebnyi rog Oberona.

2. In other examples time stops and moves backwards: 'И вдруг я испытывал ощущение как бы внезапно остановившегося и повернувшего вспять времени.' (8,17) See also 9,27 and 9,109. Similar passages may be found in most of Kataev's subsequent works.

Пока толпа стояла, он отдыхал, разглядывая звездообразный перекресток, где пересеклись не две и не три, а пять или даже семь улиц, так что каждый угловой дом напоминал узкий треугольный кусок торта. Подобным образом нарезан весь Париж, в котором почти немисливо найти две параллельные улицы. Все они где-нибудь да пересекаются. Можно сказать, что Париж - наглядное отрицание Эвклида и триумф геометрии профессора Казанского университета Лобачевского с его острейшими углами. Кстати, в Казанском университете учился и Ленин. (9,34)

Such apparent randomness of association in fact masks a very careful construction in which Kataev 'follows' Lenin through Paris, visiting the places visited by the revolutionary leader and experiencing with Lenin the Capri of 1910 or the specific physical sensation of someone watching an early aircraft taking off. The experience in every instance belongs to Kataev himself.¹ It is a method which recalls, in some respects, Pushkin's construction of the first chapter of Evgenii Onegin (although no direct influence is suggested). When Onegin supposedly attends the theatre or a ball it is actually Pushkin who recalls his own experiences and ascribes similar feelings to his hero.

The loss of a sense of time, which enables Kataev to bring together his childhood and his old age by association,

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1. The following passage reveals much about Kataev's method: 'Почему я так ясно представляю себе этот пейзаж, типичный для Иль-де-Франс лета 1911 года; знойный ветерок, шелковый блеск клеверного поля, брошенные в траву сиреневые обертки швейцарского шоколада "Сюшар", серебряные бумажки, до рези в глазах блестящие на солнце, аэроплан, косо повисший над дальней колокольней, его полупрозрачные желтые крылья с полосатыми, ребристыми тенями, напоминающими рентгеновский снимок?... Вероятно, потому, что в то время почти абсолютно все увлекались полетами, и я сам, четырнадцатилетний мальчик, затаив дыхание, лежал в полях, ловя тот сокровенный миг, когда в глазах совершалось волшебство полета, превращение тела, бегущего по земле, в тело, летящее по воздуху. Только это было не под Парижем, а под Одессой, на стрельбищном поле, где в то время тоже почти ежедневно происходили полеты. (9,101)

takes a symbolic form at two points in the work, namely in the figures of Luigi, the Capri boatman, and the old man who shows the Kataevs round the aircraft museum.

As a boy, Luigi had ferried Kataev and his father and brother into the Blue Grotto, and in the same year he had also taken Lenin in his boat (an example of Kataev's method of ascribing to Lenin his own experiences). Fifty years later, on another visit to the island, Kataev suddenly recognises a boatman as the same Luigi. The sight of him acts as an associative cue, taking Kataev back instantly to 1910. Similarly, the old man at the museum becomes, in the author's imagination, the same man who had once worked as a mechanic at the small aerodrome visited by Lenin fifty years earlier. Both Luigi and the old man act on Kataev's imagination in the same way as the frail aircraft, miraculously preserved through half a century of turbulent upheaval. They all serve to link past and present, to trigger off that instantaneous flight to an earlier age which is Kataev's equivalent of the magic of Oberon.

It is intriguing that this very personal subject matter should be woven into a tale which is apparently about Lenin. The latter could easily be seen merely as the excuse to make more acceptable an experimental piece on personal themes; but to do so would be to simplify what is probably a complex motivation. In 1958 Kataev had formally joined the Party (as he put it), and there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of his conviction at this time. By bringing together in this work a story about Lenin and a display of

his own technical virtuosity and private reminiscences Kataev anticipates the theme of Trava zabven'ya.

7.2. Mauvisme

Elements of Kataev's new style and approach to literature were evident in Malen'kaya zheleznaya dver' v stene, but it was only when he invented the term mauvisme for his new style that critics began to take notice. The term was first used in Svyatoi kolodets, and that work and the following two - Trava zabven'ya and Kubik - were to be much discussed as examples of the 'new' Kataev. Yet mauvisme did not suddenly arise in Kataev's work. Many of the aspects of his new style represented a return to features of his work of the 1920s. More specifically, all of the major features of mauvisme were outlined in a series of articles on the creative process which Kataev published in the 1950s. His fiction of that period may have been limited to one mediocre novel, but his work as editor of Yunost' and his articles on literature showed that the Thaw period had not left him unchanged. As a prelude to an examination of what is meant by mauvisme, it is necessary to look first at the series of articles on literature published, for the most part, in the 1950s.

The articles under consideration make four main points which together form the basis for Kataev's literary theory and practice in the 1960s and 1970s. All of the most important features of such works as Svyatoi kolodets, Trava zabven'ya and Kubik are here outlined or hinted at. The four points are:

the importance of innovation of form to suit new content; the role of detail; the recognition of the musicality of prose as a prominent feature; and finally, the centrality to all literature of the personality of the author.

7.2.1 Articles about the Creative Process

Innovation

In an article written in 1957 Kataev defends the paintings of the Suprematists in the early 1920s on the grounds that the painters concerned were responding to a new and revolutionary way of life by seeking new artistic forms:

'Значит, какое-то здоровое начало было в их ранних новаторских стремлениях. Они искали новых форм для выражения нового содержания.'¹ He goes on to make a plea for tolerance towards new forms in art:

Я хочу напомнить, что молодое и революционное искусство всегда связано с новаторством. Поощрять его - святая обязанность также и нашей писательской организации. Ибо без непрерывного обновления ничто не может жить, а тем более искусство. (8,388)²

It is interesting to note that Kataev takes care to stress that his wish to see innovation encouraged does not represent a threat to Socialist Realism, for he considers Socialist Realism sufficiently wide to absorb new forms:

Но по отношению к поискам подлинно революционным, новаторским - таким, которые в русле социалистического реализма ищут новых струй и течений, - мы должны быть внимательны, терпеливы, дружелюбны. (8,388)

In a later article, 'Leninskii dukh novatorstva' (1961), Kataev turns again to the problem of new forms in art, and once

1. V. Kataev, 'Slovo o novatorstve', Moskovskii literator, 30 May 1957. The article was later incorporated into 'O novatorstve' (8,384-8).
2. The tone of the article and the various references to young writers suggest that the author's intention was to defend young writers from the charge of formalism and innovation for its own sake. In this respect the article is similar to Kataev's speech at the Third Congress of Soviet Writers in 1959.

again presses strongly for their acceptance, claiming that in art, as in science and politics, innovation is an essential prerequisite of all progress. Indeed, in the field of politics and social structure the development of Soviet society under the leadership of the Communist Party has been truly innovatory.¹ Thus Kataev attempts to place his campaign for new forms in art firmly in the Communist tradition. He suggests that the Party will continue to encourage change and growth in all areas of human life, principally in the area of work, and that, as with other fields, the spirit of innovation will blow through the arts:

Как человек причастный к искусству, я, конечно, в первую очередь мечтаю о наступлении эры большого новаторского искусства, ибо только оно одно может во всей полноте отразить нашу эпоху новаторской техники и новаторской политики. (8,386)

Detail

Attention to physical detail had long been one of the distinctive features of Kataev's prose style, and in a 1955 article, 'Znat' i verit'', he explained to readers that an author had constantly to train himself to pick out his first sense impressions, for the memorable detail could often be identified with the first impression: 'Деталь - самое первоначальное впечатление. Это - первое живое наблюдение. Вот вы входите в комнату. Самое первое, свежее и непосредственное впечатление от этой комнаты и будет деталью, характеризующей ее.'² An important further point is that familiarity

1. V. Kataev, 'Leninskii dukh novatorstva', Pravda, 10 November 1961. Incorporated into 'O novatorstve'.
2. V. Kataev, 'Znat' i verit'', Literaturnaya gazeta, 29 December 1955. Incorporated into 'Mysli o tvorchestve' (8,408-23).

with objects should not be allowed to obscure their physical nature. The author must learn to look at things as if he were seeing them for the first time. Finally, the author must learn to distinguish the essential details capable of suggesting an entire scene ('ot odnoi podrobnosti - k obobshcheniyu').

In an interview which he gave to Literaturnaya gazeta in 1959 Kataev linked one aspect of his interest in detail with his desire for new methods in literature. In a rapidly changing world writers had a duty to learn the technical names for the many objects which they would have to describe. (Kataev had long tried to put this precept into practice. An interest in the precise names of objects characterises much of his work.) Thus, a new world demanded new artistic methods, and a vastly increased technical vocabulary.¹

Musicality

In 'Slovo nado lyubit', an article written in 1940,² Kataev emphasised the complex nature of the writer's basic material - the word - compared with the basic material used by other artists (painters, composers, sculptors, architects):

Слово содержит в себе не только элементы цвета, ритма, звука, пространства и времени, слово не только является образом (ибо бывает слово - образ) но слово прежде всего есть мысль и это - главное. (8,335)

By 1953 ('Novogodnii tost')³ his views on this subject had

1. D. Starikov, 'U Valentina Kataeva', Literaturnaya gazeta, 18 July 1959. One passage from this interview is particularly close to some of Kataev's pronouncements about his 'new' style of the 1960s: 'Мы слишком рабски следуем классическим образцам, слишком часто повторяем уже достигнутое нами.'
2. V. Kataev, 'Slovo nado lyubit', Literaturnaya gazeta, 15 September 1940. Republished in 8,335-6.
3. V. Kataev, 'Novogodnii tost', Literaturnaya gazeta, 1 January 1953. Republished in 8,345-7.

undergone a slight, but significant change, for he picked out one of the qualities of the word - its sound - as the most important: 'И еще одно: не следует забывать о богатейших музыкальных возможностях русского языка. Слово - это мысль.

Но слово также и звук. Мы пишем не для глухонемых. Каждая синтаксическая форма есть вместе с тем и музыкальная фраза.'

(8,346) Later in the same article Kataev goes on to stress the pre-eminence of sound, even in comparison with the author's visual powers:

Мопассан считал, что для писателя в первую очередь необходимо зрение. Я считаю, что для писателя в первую очередь необходим слух. Подчеркиваю - в первую очередь. Это не значит, что зрения не надо. Зрение - тело. Но слух - душа. Отсутствие музыкального чутья превращает даже самое "добротное" литературное произведение в более или менее талантливый протокол. (8,347)

In view of the significance of vision in Kataev's works this comment may appear surprising, but ever since Опыт Krantsa Kataev had been aware of the role of sound in prose (it is part of that 'symphonism' which he adopted from Bunin) and his conviction that sound was one of the central aspects of prose was to determine the form of Kubik.

Personality of the Author

Of the four points under discussion here the one given most prominence in Kataev's articles of the 1950s is the importance of the author's personality. It is, of course, self-evident that the personality of the author determines the nature of a literary work, but so frequently and insistently does Kataev return to the point that it clearly emerges as a plea for greater freedom of expression in literature. An

article of 1954¹ opens with a straightforward affirmation of the centrality of the author's personality in the creative process:

Ни одного вопроса искусства - и, конечно, в том числе литературы - нельзя не только правильно разрешить, но даже и поставить, если не отдавать себе полный отчет в том, каково же должно быть творческое самочувствие художника, то есть та основа основ, которая обуславливает ценность любого вида сознательной человеческой деятельности, в особенности художественной. (8,368)

More specific are two paragraphs from 'Novogodnii tost' in which Kataev claims for the author the right to interpret reality in the light of his own personality rather than in a general way which would be the same for everyone:

Но сознание художника не должно быть зеркальным: что отразилось, то и отразилось. Сознание художника должно не только отражать но и творчески преобразовать мир. Писатель, лишенный воображения и фантазии, перестает быть подлинным художником. (8,346)²

And again, with regard to the depiction of physical objects:

Изображение предмета должно быть окрашено индивидуальностью художника, как бы освещено изнутри единой, всепроникающей мыслью. (8,345)³

7.2.2 Mauvisme in the 1960s

In Svyatoi kolodets Kataev first gave the name mauvisme (or movizm) to his new style. The origin of the term is given in a passage from Svyatoi kolodets in which Kataev explains his new idea to his hostess at a cocktail party in

1. V. Kataev, 'O patriotizme sovetskoi literatury', Pravda, 15 December 1954. Republished under the title 'Tvorcheskoe samochuvstvie' in 8,368-70.
2. Compare this with the comment about Maurois in Svyatoi kolodets. (9,204) Both passages are pleas for the reintroduction of individuality and fantasy into Soviet prose.
3. It should be pointed out that alongside the articles on the creative process published in the 1950s Kataev also published a number of articles demonstrating his support for the Communist Party. See, for example, V. Kataev, 'Rech' na vtorom vsesoyuznom s'ezde sovetskikh pisatelei', Literaturnaya gazeta, 22 December 1954. Thus, his articles of the 1950s contain the seeds of the conflict which underlies Trava zabven'ya.

Houston:

Она обрадовалась, как дитя, и даже захлопала в ладоши, узнав, что я являюсь основателем новейшей литературной школы мовистов, от французского слова mauvais - плохой, - суть которой заключается в том, что так как в настоящее время все пишут очень хорошо, то нужно писать плохо, как можно хуже, и тогда на вас обратят внимания; конечно, научиться писать плохо не так-то легко, потому что приходится выдерживать адскую конкуренцию, но игра стоит свеч, и если вы действительно научитесь писать паршиво, хуже всех, то мировая популярность вам обеспечена. (9,223)

This passage has, of course, an ironical intonation which belies its literal meaning. It also contains a deliberate contradiction which arrests the reader's attention and focuses it on the meaning of the phrase 'to write badly'. How can it be that 'everyone now writes very well', and that 'the competition [among bad writers] is terribly stiff'? Kataev's phrase could be dismissed as merely provocative and not worthy of close examination, for he himself later admitted that mauvisme was not entirely serious; to some extent it was 'a polemical joke'.¹ Yet the notion of writing 'badly' is an important one which requires closer examination. When asked about his use of the words 'badly' and 'well' in this and similar passages Kataev explained that he aimed to write 'badly' in the sense in which Matisse painted 'badly'. In an age when everyone painted 'well', according to established canons, Matisse broke those canons and thereby expressed what he truly wanted to express.² Just as Matisse's revolutionary style was a reaction to a tradition of painting which had become fossilised in

1. V. Kataev, 'Ne povtoryat' sebya i drugogo', Literaturnaya gazeta, 1 January 1972.

2. From a conversation between Kataev and the present author, 18 May 1971. In the article quoted in the previous note Kataev elaborated on this idea by saying: 'Здесь выражается желание новой формы. Можно в шутку сказать, что Пушкин по отношению к Державину тоже был в какой-то степени "мовистом".'

convention, so is Kataev's intention to write 'badly' a reaction to the conventionality of Soviet prose, which he sees as inhibiting freedom of expression because certain rules must be followed without question.

In an interview which he gave to the journal Voprosy literatury Kataev sheds further light on this aspect of his thinking by comparing the conventions to a child's building bricks which can be combined only in a limited number of ways. Of the writers who are bound by the set patterns of conventional Soviet prose he says: 'Кирпичики сделаны до них, за них, а им остается только сменять варианты. Занятие нехлопотное.'¹

More than thirty years earlier, at the First Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934, Isaak Babel' had also commented on 'bad' writing:

Всегда за Горьким мне хочется сказать, что на нашем знамени должны быть написаны слова Соболева, что все нам дано партией и правительством и отнято только одно право - плохо писать.

Товарищи, не будем скрывать. Это было очень важное право, и отнимают у нас немало.² Это была привилегия, которой мы широко пользовались.

Behind Babel's jocular tone there is a serious idea. If a writer agrees to any stricture on his artistic freedom from an external source, even if it is apparently an aesthetic stricture, then the way is open for control of the writer by the outside forces which lay down the standards. In retrospect it can be seen that Babel's apprehensions were well founded, for the history of Soviet literature since 1934 is evidence enough that strictly non-aesthetic criteria can become confused with aesthetic

1. V. Kataev, 'Obnovlenie prozy', Voprosy literatury, 1971, No. 2, p. 128.

2. I. Babel', 'Rech' na pervom vsesoyuznom s'ezde sovetskikh pisatelei' in Izbrannoe (M., 1966), p. 411.

criteria, and that conventional writing can be looked on as the only good way of writing. In 1934 Soviet writers were called upon to give up the right to write badly, which was to lead ultimately to the stifling of individuality by the conventions of Socialist Realism. Kataev's intention to write 'badly' is a refusal to accept the view that 'conventional' necessarily equals 'good'. It is in this sense that his joke of mauvisme is 'polemical' - a polemic against Socialist Realist conventions.

The attempt to break free from convention in literature is by no means peculiar to Soviet literature. Indeed, Kataev frequently cites famous Russian authors such as Tolstoi or Bunin, who expressed similar ideas long before the birth of Socialist Realism. In Kubik, for example, Kataev quotes Bunin as saying: 'Но я никогда не пишу того, что мне хочется. Не смею. Мне хочется писать без всякой формы, не согласуясь ни с какими литературными приемами.' (9,453)

Nevertheless, the Soviet writer's difficulties with regard to the stifling nature of literary devices are compounded by the existence of an officially approved set of conventions. Perhaps the extent of Kataev's praise for the poet Voznesenskii, which at first sight may appear exaggerated, can be more easily understood if it is remembered that Voznesenskii, too, is a stylistic innovator, concerned to break down the barrier of convention between his thought and his readers. Of him Kataev has said:

Настоящая поэзия начинается тогда, когда поэт перестает ощущать сдерживающие его условности формы, метрики, традиции вкусов, то есть когда, сбросив с себя все навязанное ему извне, чужое, заштампованное, он вдруг в один счастливый миг

делается самим собой: вот он - совершенно новый, неповторимый, дерзкий, и вот перед ним его свободно выбранная тема, его свободная мысль - и между ними нет никаких преград, их ничто не разделяет, не тормозит их взаимовлияния и не препятствует полному, самобытному воплощению идеи в слове.¹

Kataev's mauviste prose is the counterpart of Voznesenskii's verse in its 'unfettered quality'. In order to achieve what he has called 'inner creative emancipation' ('vnutrennee tvorcheskoe raskreposhchenie')² Kataev attempts to break free from formal conventions, without, however, losing sight of the danger inherent in his attempt. His references to mauvisme are frequently accompanied by a doubting, ironical attitude typified by the statement: 'По-видимому, литературный прием, заключающийся в полном отрицании литературного приема, это и есть мовизм.' (9,454) Nevertheless, one of his aims is to force his reader to consider whether the literary devices which have become conventional in Soviet literature are the only possibilities.

Of the conventional devices rejected by Kataev the most important is probably plot, or sustained illusion. In neither Svyatoi kolodets nor Kubik is there a sustained plot in the conventional sense. In the former work the associative leaps from one topic and scene to another are justified by a dream logic which, although it still represented an unusual experience for the Russian reader used to the method of Socialist Realism, was not completely unheard of. In Kubik, Kataev goes further by demolishing even this link with a conventional realistic

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1. V. Kataev, 'Nemnogo ob avtore' in A. Voznesenskii, Ten' zvuka (M., 1970), p. 5.
 2. V. Kataev, 'Obnovlenie prozy', p. 128.

plot, leaping from one story line to another in a capricious fashion.

Much more important than plot is the personality of the author himself, which is not hidden or subordinated to the demands of the story. By rejecting the convention of sustained plot Kataev focuses attention on what might be called the virtuoso aspect of his literary work. The reader is not allowed to view the book as a completed piece of work, but is constantly reminded of the role of the author in its creation. If the latter so wishes he can bring a particular story to an end and begin another. The associations sparked off in his memory provide the impetus to move the work forward. If he elects to linger over the description of a banknote or a flower, conveying the minutest detail of the object so that the reader can almost feel it, then he will do so. Kataev answers the reader's queries about the genre of Kubik and at the same time underlines the very important virtuoso aspect by calling his work: 'Не повесть, не роман, не очерк, не путевые заметки, а просто соло на фаготе с оркестром.' (9,536)¹ He even forces the reader to consider what is involved in writing by challenging him to emulate his, Kataev's, own descriptive powers:

Разумеется, я мог бы, как говорят, "со свойственной ему наблюдательностью и мягким юмором" описать эти толстые шелковые галстуки от Ланвена, из которых самый дешевый стоил франков сто двадцать, - но для чего? Кому это надо? А если вам так этого хочется, то "вот вам мое стило и - так сказать - можете описывать сами". (9,523-4)²

1. In addition to the virtuoso aspect, in this extract Kataev emphasises the importance of the musical construction of Kubik.
2. In view of the aggressive attitude to critics expressed in this extract it is appropriate that the last sentence should be a quotation from Mayakovskii ('Razgovor s fininspektorom o poezii') whose sharp words were occasionally directed against critics.

Or again, the final words of Kubik echo the challenge to the reader:

Я бы, конечно, сумел описать майскую парижскую ночь с маленькой гелиотроповой луной посреди неба, отдаленную баррикадную перестрелку и узкие улицы Монмартрского холма, как бы нежные детские руки, поддерживающие еще не вполне наполненный белый монгольфьер одного из белых куполов церкви Сакре-Нёр, вот-вот готовый улететь к луне... но зачем? (9,536)

Some critics have been offended by this aspect of Svyatoi kolodets, Trava zabven'ya and, especially, Kubik,¹ and indeed, it is intended to provoke the reader. But it is not simply provocation for its own sake. Kataev is capricious and provocative so that the reader may recognise the tone of his voice and come to understand that if the work has any significance then it is because of the author's unique view.

Because of the importance which he now imputes to the unique feeling and vision of the artist, Kataev believes that it is valuable to attempt to record his thoughts at an almost pre-conscious level. On this subject he quotes both Tolstoi and Mandel'shtam.² He now believes that a work of art ought to be as close as possible in form to the inspiration which lies behind it.³ When literary devices become totally conventional they falsify artistic truth, for they force the author away from his original feeling. Perhaps the best statement of the almost pre-conscious nature of mauvisme is the image of lightning in Kubik:

Молнии еще нет, добавляю я, есть только та внезапно проведенная между небом и землей борозда - безмолвная и невидимая, может быть

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1. See, for example, V. Smirnova, 'No zachem?', Literaturnaya Rossiya, 11 July 1969; E. Bal'burov, 'Svoeobrazie syuzheta novoi kataevskoi prozy (Trava zabven'ya)', Russkaya literatura, 1973, No. 2, p. 189.
 2. See V. Kataev, 'Obnovlenie prozy', p. 128.
 3. Compare with Blok's poem 'Khudozhnik'.

лишь слегка шуршащий зигзаг, - как бш первый карандашный набросок молнии, ее Психея, след, по которому через мгновение, слепя и вселяя в душу восторг грозы, промчится подлинная молния, преображая окружающий пейзаж, делая мир черно-белым негативом. Может быть, это и есть один из главных законов мовизма - начертить бесшумный проект молнии. (9,495)

The quality of the finished work of literature will vary according to the talent of the author, but provided he has been as faithful as possible to the original inspiration, what he has to say will be worthwhile, for it will be part of his unique vision of the world. In Trava zabven'ya a similar point is made by quoting from Stanislavskii, who is addressing an actor: '- Можете играть хорошо. Можете играть плохо. Играйте, как вам угодно. Меня это не интересует. Мне важно, чтобы вы играли верно.' (9,266)

Another major convention rejected by Kataev in his mauviste works is chronology. Already in Malen'kaya zheleznaya dver' v stene he had demonstrated his interest in the power of memory to provide an alternative (by associative leaps) to chronology as the organising factor in a work of literature. In Kubik Kataev states: '...хронология, по-моему, только вредит настоящему искусству и время - главный враг художника.' (9,481) He feels that there is nothing inevitable about the use of time as an organising principle in literature; it is no more than 'a working hypothesis, an abstraction' ('prosto rabochaya gipoteza, abstraktsiya'). (9,468) In the three works being considered here Kataev has replaced chronology by another working hypothesis - free association in the memory of the author. It is significant that Kataev has called mauvisme

'a working hypothesis' - the very term he used to describe chronology.¹ In describing his method of working on Razbitaya zhizn' he remarks: 'В произведении не соблюдается какой-либо строгий принцип, например хронологический...Я вспоминаю - и воспоминание строит повествование.'²

Memory works not chronologically but by association. It has the power to move back and forward in time, sifting experiences and bringing them together. The trigger which sets off a chain of associations is frequently a sensory experience as, for instance, at the beginning of Trava zabven'ya when the author is examining a red flower, the name of which is unknown to him: '...и тогда я легко и без усилий вспомнил точно такое же знойное июльское утро, башню Новалевского и открытую веранду...' (9,251) When memory serves to construct the narrative then the sequence of experiences is irrelevant; it is the experience itself which matters. The irrelevance of temporal relationships accounts for an aspect of Svyatoi kolodets which would otherwise be puzzling - namely, the narrator's feeling that he can see into the future. While on the way to America he feels a presentiment of harm; moreover, he recognises cities which he has never visited before. But more forceful than these examples is the case of the death of President Kennedy, which Kataev claims to have seen on television in Houston a year and a half before it happened.

Потом, года через полтора, в другое время и в другом месте, я увидел эти же самые кадры, появившиеся вполне законно, по дороге из прошлого в будущее.

Но теперь, в Хьюстоне, они были выходцами из будущего. (9,228)

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1. During a conversation with the present author on 18 May 1971 Kataev referred to mauvisme as 'a working hypothesis'.
 2. V. Kataev, 'Obnovlenie prozy', p. 131.

From the point in time when the work was written, both Kataev's stay in Houston and his experience (via television) of the death of President Kennedy were in the past - the domain of memory - and although they actually took place at different times memory destroys the temporal link and replaces it by an associative one.

The way in which chronology is destroyed by memory is strongly felt at one point in Trava zabven'ya where Kataev is re-experiencing in memory a meeting with Mayakovskii:

По отношению к прошлому будущее находится в настоящем. По отношению к будущему настоящее находится в прошлом. Так где же нахожусь я сам?

Неужели для меня теперь нет постоянного места в мире?

Или "теперь" - это то же самое, что "тогда"?

- Ну так что же, сказал теперь Маяковский, усаживаясь на диван, - вы хозяин. Я гость. Занимайте. (9,393)

Similarly, in Svyatoi kolodets Kataev describes how, looking out of his window one day, he saw a girl standing by a bush. Later that evening he looks again and she is still there, and next morning he sees her yet again. Only then does he realise that it was not a girl he had seen but simply the bush.

А девушки совсем не было, или это была Людмила в шапочке-невидимке в саду Черномора. А вернее девушка была когда-то гораздо раньше, может быть полстолетия назад, и тогда она действительно стояла на цыпочках, как балерина, на дорожке, посыпанной морским песком с ракушками, и она подсматривала за мной, а может быть за кем-нибудь другим. (9,205)

Just as the flower in Trava zabven'ya caused Kataev to recall his first meeting with Bunin, so does the sight of the bush cause him to recall the girl who had once stood by it. Because the girl and the bush are linked by association, the one is not

more distant than the other. Both are experienced afresh by the author in the present.

One of Kataev's major preoccupations in his mauviste works is the nature of art itself. As in the case of Bunin's work, memory and art are inextricably bound together.¹ Memory plays a part in the inspiration for a work of art and art gives permanent form to memories which would otherwise not outlive the individual. If an experience is to survive permanently it must be recorded in art. The following thoughts from Trava zabven'ya are provoked by looking at some poems which Kataev himself had written some forty years before:

Теперь - больше сорока лет тому вперед - я перебирал (или перебираю?) обветшалые листки с ломко осыпающимися краями, как бы сожженными серной кислотой времени... Меня того, прежнего, юного, уже нет. Я не сохранился. Карандаш исписался. А плохие стихи, нацарапанные на бумаге, легкой, как пепел, - вот они! - остались. Разве это не чудо? (9,340; 341-2)

Literature has the capacity to overcome the passage of time, firstly because the author records his experiences, and secondly because of the participation of the reader in these experiences. The artist records the uniqueness of an experience, but the act of recording is not enough. In order that the unique vision of the artist may be preserved it must be re-experienced in every generation by being transformed from the medium of marks on paper, or musical notes, or paint on canvas to the consciousness of other human beings who can remember it. Kataev's idea is expressed in a musical image in the following

1. See, for example, Bunin's story Nadpisi, Sobranie sochinenii, vol. 5, pp. 171-6.

passage from Kubik:

Мощный удар по клавишам, аккорд, является в одно и то же время и смертью звука, и рождением его для новой, уже не материальной, но духовной жизни, - наверное даже вечной, так как она уже таинственным образом навсегда остается в сознании человечества и, таким образом, начнет отсчет своего бессмертия. (9,456)

This notion is similar to one expressed by several Soviet authors, such as Olesha (through his character Ivan Babichev in Zavist') and Bulgakov (through the figure of Levii Matvei in Master i Margarita), namely that the artist has the power to create a myth which will be carried from generation to generation. The opening passage of Kubik illustrates the nature and power of myth. The young boy, Ryurik Pchelkin, discovers the letters OV (standing for odesskii vodoprovod) chalked in various places and weaves around them a tale about a mysterious gang who leave these letters as a secret sign. Long after he has left the town, the boys and girls of Odessa continue to believe in the magic of the myth created by Pchelkin, and the letters OV exert a fascination for succeeding generations of Odessa children. The truth about the letters is prosaic but what is remembered is Pchelkin's myth.

Several times in the course of Svyatoi kolodets, Trava zabven'ya and Kubik Kataev makes tentative suggestions for definitions of mauvisme. One of these (from Svyatoi kolodets) is 'an attempt at constructing a third system of signals' ('opyt postroeniya tret'ei signal'noi sistemy'). (9,243) The

idea of a third system of signals for human communication first occurs near the beginning of Svyatoi kolodets in a passage in which Kataev begins his plea for the reintroduction of abstract, modernistic elements into Soviet art, including literature. Significantly, he uses a comment by Courbet, the supreme example of a realistic painter, as a starting point:

Курбе говорил: "То, чего мы не видим, несуществующее и абстрактное, не относится к области живописи". Это верно, но к какой-то области оно все же относится? Я думаю к области новой - третьей - сигнальной системы. (9.149)

These thoughts about a third system of signals follow a passage about traffic signs which, despite their abstract shape, carry a practical message for man, serving to warn him of dangers ahead. The implied comparison between the function of modern art and that of traffic signs accounts, in part, for the prescience theme which runs through Svyatoi kolodets and which will be discussed later in this chapter.

It is significant that Kataev should choose to compare, by implication, his new work with traffic signs, because traffic signs combine an abstract form with a utilitarian function and Kataev is anxious to emphasise that for all their use of fantasy and their apparent strangeness, his mauviste works do not represent a complete departure from realism. In one of the key passages from Svyatoi kolodets he says:

Моруа утверждает, что нельзя жить сразу в двух мирах - действительном и воображаемом. Кто хочет и того и другого - терпит фиаско. Я уверен, что Моруа ошибается: фиаско терпит тот, кто живет в каком-нибудь одном из этих двух миров; он себя обкрадывает, так как лишается ровно

половины красоты и мудрости жизни.

Я всегда прежде жил в двух измерениях. Одно без другого для меня невысказано. Их разделение сразу превратило бы искусство либо в абстракцию, либо в плоский протокол. Только слияние этих двух стихий может создать искусство поистине прекрасное. В этом, может быть, и заключается сущность мавизма. (9,204)

Mauvisme represents a combination of the real world and the fantasy world of pure imagination. It allows for the re-introduction into Kataev's work of that element of fantasy which had been one of its prominent features in the 1920s but which had largely been extinguished by the exigencies of Socialist Realism. Kataev has apparently claimed that mauvisme does not represent a departure from Socialist Realism,¹ but there can be no doubt that his call for the re-introduction of elements of fantasy is close to that made by Terts in his essay 'Chto takoe sotsialisticheskii realizm?'.² Terts declares that the best way forward for Soviet literature lies in the combination of realistic and fantastic art, in the creation of a new phantasmagoric art, of which his own story Pkhents might serve as an example. Svyatoi kolodets, too, follows this path, and if, as Kataev claims, it is compatible with Socialist Realism, it is a Socialist Realism

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1. In the introduction by R. Daglish to the English translation of Trava zabven'ya Kataev is quoted as having said: 'In a sense mauvisme could even be described as a higher stage of Socialist Realism. For ten years during the period of Stalin worship, Soviet aesthetics remained at a complete standstill, and even today critics and writers are hampered by patterns of thought that are essentially idealistic. They are guided by the intellect rather than the senses. They may acknowledge materialism, the primacy of matter, in theory, but in practice they no longer trust the evidence of their senses. Mauvisme offers release from the straightjacket of old-fashioned concepts and a return to immediacy of feeling without which art can not live.' V. Katayev, The Grass of Oblivion (London, 1969), p. iii.
 2. A. Terts, Fantasticheskii mir Abrama Tertsy (New York, 1967), p. 446.

very different from that which had partly stifled Kataev's creativity for decades.¹

In his mauviste works Kataev returns to a manner of writing not dissimilar to that used in such stories of the 1920s as Ser Genri i chert and Zheleznoe kol'tso, albeit without the lighthearted optimism he had shown in these works. Kataev himself clearly feels the links between his mauviste works and some of his early stories, and he has been at pains to stress them: 'Но сегодняшний, "совсем новый" Катаев возник, однако, не вдруг. Думаю, что черты моего нового стиля заметны уже в рассказе "Железное кольцо", а также в рассказе 20-го года "Сер Генри и черт".'²

7.3 Svyatoi kolodets

Svyatoi kolodets is, together with Kubik, the most complex of Kataev's works. In it he ranges widely in time (from the first decade of the twentieth century to the 1960s) and place (Odessa, Moscow, Tbilisi, Peredelkino and America are among the settings). The range of styles employed is equally wide, from sharp satire to lyrical passages extolling the beauties of Russia reminiscent of Gogol's description of the Dnepr. The book contains narrative passages (excellently

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1. Kataev has tacitly admitted the stifling effect on him of Socialist Realism: 'И в 30-е годы у меня были свои "трудности роста". Я чувствовал тогда, что осознание новых творческих задач чрезвычайно усложнило самый процесс моего труда. И тогда был переходный период преодоления старых форм. Я искал в то время более простого языка и ситуации, добивался предельной обнаженности мысли. Все же, сегодня не могу не сказать себе: упорный труд в те годы оборачивался иногда утратой драгоценного "предвпечатления". Я довольствовался порой выработанным восьмым, девятым, десятым впечатлением.' 'Obnovlenie prozy', p. 131.
 2. V. Kataev, 'Obnovlenie prozy', p. 131.

told), descriptions, authorial musings on a variety of subjects, notably literature.

The 1960s was a time of reassessment for Kataev. In 1961 he underwent a serious operation which forms the basis for one narrative level in Svyatoi kolodets. He also travelled widely in Europe (which he described in Malen'kaya zheleznaya dver' v stene) and America, which he visited briefly in 1959 and again, at greater length, in 1963. To judge from Svyatoi kolodets, these experiences played a part in the reassessment of his life and times which Kataev undertook in the 1960s. Near the beginning of Svyatoi kolodets Kataev explains the literal meaning of the title and admits that the book results from serious contemplation of his life.

' "Святой колодец" - название небольшого родничка вблизи станции Переделькино Киевской железной дороги, возле которого я обдумывал эту книгу и размышлял о своей жизни.' (9,147)¹

1. In view of this comment it is not necessary to maintain a strict distinction between the author and narrator. Although the dream structure suggests it would be wiser to speak of a narrator, the work loses some of its significance if it is dissociated, or even distanced, from the views of the author himself. The compiler of the notes to Svyatoi kolodets in the collected works edition maintains that it is largely autobiographical. (9,650) For a contrary view see I. Grinberg, 'Nablyudatel'nost' ili litsezrenie?', Voprosy literatury, 1968, No. 1, pp. 61-77.

7.3.1 The Operation

The narrator of Svyatoi kolodets, who may be identified with Kataev, undergoes an operation during the course of which he has a number of dreams. The work opens with a conversation between Kataev and the nurse who is preparing him for the operation:

- Запейте водичкой. Вот так. А теперь спите спокойно. Я вам обещаю райские сны.

- Цветные?

- Какие угодно, - сказала она и вышла из палаты. (9,145)

Throughout the dreams which follow, Kataev frequently returns to the reality of the operation. For example, during the dream about America he meets in the first class compartment of an aeroplane a negro whom he takes to be a senior doctor. The association with medicine brings him back to the reality of his operation:

Я уже когда-то видел подобные глаза, глядящие вам прямо в душу как бы из прорези полумаски.

- Отлично. Завтра я вас усыплю в лучшем виде. Ручаюсь, что вы даже не заметите. А теперь спите спокойно. (9,198)

Or again, in the middle of a dream about heaven we read:

Может быть, мое обнаженное тело лежало где-то в ином измерении и голубые люди при свете операционного прожектора рассматривали на нем давние шрамы: пулевые и осколочные и следы разных болезней, войн и революций. (9,174)

The operation and the anaesthetic which it entails provide a justification for the dreams, which otherwise would have appeared too fantastic in a literature which had largely eschewed fantasy for thirty years. In this respect Svyatoi kolodets resembles Ser Genri i chert, in which a typhoid victim's

delirium is used as a device for the introduction of fantasy, with fluid transition from one phase of the delirium to the next by means of free association.

On one level the operation is performed by a surgeon on the author's body, but in addition it takes on symbolic significance through its connection with Pushkin's poem 'Prorok', lines from which are scattered through Svyatoi kolodets. On this symbolic level the operation represents a spiritual and artistic cleansing.

The first quotation from 'Prorok' - the first line of the poem - interrupts a description of New York on a quiet Sunday morning. (9,187) It is followed by several further quotations from the poem, one of which appears to link Pushkin's six-winged seraphim with the surgeon performing the operation on Kataev (thereby adding another level to the operation):

И вот в тот самый миг, когда я наконец разглядел
плащаницу своего распростертого тела, очень яркий,
но вместе с тем совсем не резкий свет операционной
лампы, похожий на солнечный, ударил вдруг мне в
глаза сверху, и я почувствовал позади себя присутствие
пылающего шестикрылого серафима, перед лицом которого
все расступалось. (9,217)

The poet in 'Prorok' has his sinful tongue torn out by the six-winged seraphim. In Svyatoi kolodets the line 'I vyrval greshnyi moi yazyk' follows the final meeting between Kataev and the woman he has come to America to see, the woman with whom he has been in love all his life. (9,239) It thus comes at an important point in the book, and may signify Kataev's rejection of certain aspects of his previous work. In order to emphasise the transformation which he has undergone, he depicts himself as a winged figure, similar, therefore, to Pushkin's seraphim. Significantly, earlier in the work

Kataev had linked the physical operation with a spiritual one affecting his art. After drawing a satirical portrait of Prokhindeikin and hinting that the latter represented, in part, an aspect of himself, a tumour in his intestine, he cries out: 'Хоть бы эту опухоль скорее вырезали!' (9,169)

Thus, the operation undergone by Kataev works on two levels. He describes a real operation during the course of which he sees various dreams, returning occasionally to a vague awareness of what is being done to him. But, more importantly, the operation symbolises a spiritual and artistic reassessment by Kataev, which is the work's central theme, and which accounts for the tone of high seriousness of much of the writing.

7.3.2 The Dreams

As with the operation itself the dreams are, for the most part, based on concrete incidents from Kataev's life overlaid with a further level of significance (although some, such as the dream about the talking cat) are examples of symbolic fantasy. At one point Kataev admits the link between his dreams and real incidents: 'Собственно говоря, все это мне вовсе не снилось, а было на самом деле, но так мучительно давно, что теперь предстало передо мной в форме давнего, время от времени повторяющегося сновидения.' (9,161)

The principle determining the sequence of the dreams appears to be free association, one dream giving rise to the next. The narrative thus flows unbroken and the sudden shifts of scene and style are explicable in terms of the

changing moods of the dreams. Although some features run through the entire book it is possible to isolate the major dreams and discuss them sequentially.

After Death

The first dream into which Kataev is plunged is a complex one which he entitles 'After death',¹ and into which is embedded a separate 'dream within a dream' about the talking cat.

'After death' opens with the author and his wife sitting by the Holy Well in Peredelkino watching an old man washing an endless supply of bottles. He takes bottles of all shapes and sizes from his sack and washes them in the well, yet his sack never becomes empty. Kataev does not leave the image of the old man with the never ending sack full of bottles to the interpretation of the reader; he supplies an explicit commentary on his image:

Жена сказала, пожимая плечами, что это
вовсе и не мешок, а самая обыкновенная прорва,
в смысле прорва времени, попросту говоря вечность.

Вечность оказалась совсем не страшной и
гораздо более доступной пониманию, чем мы
предполагали прежде. (9, 146)

As befits an image of eternity, the old man at the well is mentioned both at the beginning and at the end of the book. It seems likely that the various bottles represent human beings, brought for a short time from the sack of eternity, only to be returned to it after a brief spell in the Holy Well. Such a view of life and of time is supported by another image

1. The sentence 'Nazvanie: psle smerti' comes towards the middle of the dream. (9, 159)

of the effect of eternity on matter, which comes towards the end of the book, when Kataev at last meets again the woman he knew in his youth. Seeing her standing at her gate he feels she has been there for eternity:

Эта мысль не показалась мне странной, потому что формальное измерение времени, искусственно оторванного от пространства, общепринятое у людей - годы, сутки, часы, минуты, столетия, - дает лишь условное, искаженное представление о подлинном времени. (9,233)

Kataev feels certain that the traditional view of time slipping inexorably by like sand in an hour-glass leads to a mistaken view of the nature of life and time. Much more accurate is an image of time in terms of the changing form of matter:

...гораздо более точное представление о времени дает не песок, сыплющийся неощутимой струйкой из одной колбочки в другую, а простой камень, "с течением времени" превращающийся постепенно в песок, или же песок, превращающийся постепенно в камень и снова "с течением времени" делающийся песком, потому что здесь я не только ощущаю, но вижу разрушительное или создающее действие времени, не отделимого от материи. (9,233)¹

There are many other digressions on the nature of time, particularly in the American dream. Kataev poses the questions 'is time reversible?', and 'who will return to me lost time?', and at one level Svyatoi kolodets represents an attempt to explore the well of his own past and to draw from it some moments worth preserving for all time through art. By means of exceptionally vivid, concrete writing Kataev resurrects certain moments with such clarity and attention to detail that the illusion is created that these moments are actually being relived.

1. Similar preoccupations with the nature of time and matter can be found in Trava zabven'ya and Kubik.

For all its apparent materialism, Kataev's view of time has much in common with Buddhism, and it is significant that in both Svyatoi kolodets and Trava zabven'ya he makes several oblique references to that religion.¹ The old man at the well melts imperceptibly into a Chinaman from Kunming, which Kataev twice refers to as the city of eternal spring.² An important sentence, which could be understood in a Buddhist sense, refers to death and re-birth: '...человек не может умереть, не родившись, а родиться, не умерев...' (9,246) This sentiment, unusual in a Soviet work, must be taken as referring primarily to spiritual rebirth (and it is thus related to the operation performed by the six-winged seraphim); but it also accords with Kataev's view of the effect of time on matter, and it could thus have a literal meaning, which would align it with Buddhist philosophy.

After fleeing from Southern China, Kataev and his wife settle down somewhere in Western Europe to a bucolic existence. 'Мы занимали, согласно своему вкусу, не большой, но и не маленький пряничный домик в два этажа с высокой черепичной крышей и прелестным садиком, полным цветов.' (9,147) Kataev gives a very cool, detached description of the way of life in this house, stressing in particular the important role of food and drink. The physical objects appear almost tangible, so detailed is the description; yet there is a deliberate coldness about the writing which some critics have objected to, but

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1. It is worth noting that Buddhist ideas play a considerable part in Bunin's work.
 2. This description appears to have a symbolic significance. It could be connected with the theme of art stopping time.

which suits perfectly the slightly ironical, very detached attitude adopted by the author to his own materialistic values and those of his friends. Later, with the appearance of the Kozlovichi, this ironical tone intensifies to become openly satirical in such passages as that in which Kataev shows his guests the luxury bathroom:

Тогда я торжественно распахнул другую дверь и показал им великолепную, ультрасовременную ванную комнату с кобальтово-синим фаянсовым туалетным столом на одной ножке, молочно-белой ванной, всю залитую ослепительно ярким электрическим светом, сияющую кафелем, никелем, всю увешанную пушисто-душистыми розовыми, салатными, голубыми полотенцами и простынями и устланную грубыми кокосовыми ковриками. Для того чтобы убедить Козловичей, что это не сон, я открыл несколько кранов, и с симфоническим шумом из них хлынула добела взбитая, как яичные белки, горячая и холодная вода, наполняя помещение поистине вагнеровской музыкой и запахом мыла "герлен". (9,174)

The satire in this picture of a comfortable, materialistic heaven derives in part from the lushness of the descriptions (cobalt-blue; milk-white; fragrantly fluffy towels etc.), but also from the contrast between this scene and the harrowing dream which precedes it in which the indignities and horrors of the Stalin era are alluded to. Kataev interrupts his picture of heaven with a reference to Mandel'shtam and the dream of the talking cat, with the result that the heavenly bathroom appears grotesque. It is a curious coincidence that a very similar effect is achieved by Nadezhda Mandel'shtam in her Vospominaniya, in which Mandel'shtam's material poverty is contrasted with the newly acquired (in the 1930s) riches of such authors as Kataev, Petrov and Fedin.¹

1. N. Mandel'shtam, Vospominaniya, pp. 296-8. The picture of Kataev which emerges from this book is entirely consistent with the self-portrait in Svyatoi kolodets. Nadezhda Mandel'shtam depicts Kataev as a talented man with a genuine appreciation of poetry which distinguished him from most successful contemporary authors. But she also suggests that he had a thirst for public acclaim and material reward which he satisfied by writing 'like Walter Scott', i.e.

In the satirical dream of heaven as a well-appointed modern house Kataev questions the values which he and most of his contemporaries hold (once again demonstrating his ability to depict himself in a slightly unsympathetic light). Within the framework of the heaven dream are contained three short, apparently unrelated incidents in which Kataev cryptically examines various aspects of his life in a search for a key to its meaning.

Hyena and Jackal

The first of these short sequences involves his children and his grandchild, Valentina. When he begins to long for their company in heaven he is at first a little disconcerted, for he believed he had left behind him all thoughts of family and friends.¹ But his peaceful, totally emotionless existence is jolted by a sudden wave of love for his granddaughter which almost overwhelms him by its force:

(Note 1 contd. from previous page)

prolifically: 'Что было бы с Катаевым, если б ему не пришлось писать "Вальтер-Скотта"? Это был очень талантливый человек, остроумный и острый, из тех, кто составляет самое просвещенное крыло текущей многотиражной литературы.' (p. 299)

1. Compare the following line from Svyatoi kolodets: 'Сам я никогда ни о чем не вспоминал. Я всем простил и все забыл.' (9,152) with a poem of 1944:

Когда я буду умирать,
О жизни сожалеть не буду.
Я просто лягу на кровать
И всем прощу. И все забуду. (9,638)

A fuller version of this poem may be found in Trava zabven'ya (9,432-3). It is interesting to note that this poem dates from that period when Kataev turned once again to poetry after several years of inactivity in that genre. Nadezhda Mandel'shtam claims that he was inspired to write poetry again by a meeting with her in Tashkent and the consequent thoughts about Mandel'shtam (Vospominaniya, p. 299). If Kataev did have Mandel'shtam in mind when writing 'Kogda ya budu umirat' then his oblique reference to the poem in Svyatoi kolodets may be because of this, for he goes on to speak of Mandel'shtam in the second of the three short dreams in the early part of the book.

В моем воображении появились маленькие детские ручки, крепенькие и по-цыгански смуглые, с грязными ноготками. Они протянулись ко мне, и тотчас же я почувствовал страстное желание увидеть внучку, втащить к себе на колени, тискать, качать, щекотать, нюхать детское тельце, целовать маленькие, пытливо-разбойничьи воробьиные глазки, только что ставшие познавать мир. (9,152)

Having allowed such feelings to enter the idyllic but dispassionate world in which he now exists, the narrator cannot keep out thoughts of his own children, whom he tenderly calls by the family nicknames of Jackal and Hyena. His thoughts of them are concentrated in a recollection of one day in the early 1950s when the family went for a ride in a small car near the Kiev railway station in Moscow. A quarrel develops between the children about whether a vat which they see contains kvass or paraffin, and even when drinking the kvass the girl stubbornly maintains that it is paraffin. The very concretely narrated scene is clearly based on a real incident (a recollection which becomes a dream), yet Kataev deliberately generalises it through his treatment of the weather, which is by turns springlike, autumnal, and summery. The sharply defined shadows and bright colours suggest spring or autumn, but the unbearable heat suggests summer. The many references in this scene to unnatural heat which carbonises clothing and appears to come from Hiroshima link it to the running theme of nuclear war, but the incident's principal significance lies in Kataev's love for his children. By choosing one particular day he is able to demonstrate his emotion through concrete description, but by generalising the setting he turns the feelings of one day into something of wider significance. If one of Kataev's aims in Svyatoi kolodets is to assess the

meaning of his life, then there can be no doubt that the love for his children and grandchild, which illuminates his otherwise passionless writing with deep emotion, has played an important part.

Osip Mandel'shtam

The second of the three inserted dreams concerns Mandel'shtam, and once again Kataev narrows his focus to a particular incident in which he and Olesha 'abduct' Nadezhda Mandel'shtam and take her to a restaurant where Mandel'shtam later joins them and recites one of his poems about Tiflis.¹ In passing, as it were, Kataev fires a shot at those who keep Mandel'shtam's work unpublished in the Soviet Union.² After quoting some lines of Mandel'shtam he says: 'И так далее - можно проверить и восстановить по книжке Мандельштама, если ее удастся достать, - мне именно так приснилось: если ее удастся достать,...' (9,160-1)³ The full significance of the recurring dream about Mandel'shtam emerges only when it is read in conjunction with the following dreams about the talking cat and the luxurious bathroom. Mandel'shtam's presence can be felt in the background of Svyatoi kolodets and Trava zabven'ya as an example of an uncompromising artist - one of the few who refused to let his words be dictated by

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1. The poem is 'Mne Tiflis gorbatyi snilsya', Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh (Washington, 1964), vol. 1, pp. 83-4.
 2. Svyatoi kolodets was, of course, written before the appearance of the Biblioteka poeta edition of Mandel'shtam's poetry (L., 1973).
 3. The references to Mandel'shtam are aimed at those relatively few readers who appreciate the poet's importance. Similarly, Kataev refers to paintings by Kandinskii and Malevich. Towards the end of Svyatoi kolodets he refers to the work as 'a book for the few' ('kniga dlya nemnogikh'), presumably as opposed to the mass appeal of works of Socialist Realism. (9,240)

those with power. He was no 'talking cat', and he never reaped the material benefits which the 'talking cats' claimed as their right. Yet his poetry is of the highest quality, and his presence in Svyatoi kolodets indicates Kataev's questioning of certain aspects of his own work. In Kataev's assessment of the meaning of his life, Mandel'shtam symbolises the courage which he himself lacks.

The Talking Cat

The dream about Mandel'shtam shades almost imperceptibly into the surrealistic tale of the talking cat. The mention of Mandel'shtam's poem about Georgia leads Kataev to recall a dream set in a cold, snowbound Tiflis. The first part of the dream deals with a hack writer who accompanies Kataev to Georgia.

Мы - это я и еще один, скажем, человек. Вернее фантом, мой странный спутник, который приехал со мной в этот край и теперь неотступно, как тень, сопровождал меня на полшага позади: противовещественный гибрид человека-дятла с костяным носом стерляди, клоунскими глазами, грузная скотина - в смысле животное, - шутник, подхалим, блатмейстер, доносчик, лизоблюд и стяжатель-хапуга. (9,163)

Kataev's hated companion is called Prokhindeikin - 'a modification of Faddei Bulgarin'. (9,169) The reference to Bulgarin, a contemporary of Pushkin who was reputed to be a police spy, suggests that Prokhindeikin may be a writer who betrayed his fellows to the secret police - an official of the Writers' Union who has risen to the top by virtue of his talent for being photographed alongside important people. Yet the

reference to him as a tumour suggests that in part he represents an aspect of Kataev's own personality which he now rejects.

Abject as the lickspittle Prokhindeikin is, he merely acts as an introduction to a far more powerful image of the conformism of terrified writers during the Stalin era - the talking cat. At a party in Georgia the host entertains his guests with a cat which says 'mama' and 'maman' in Russian and French when two fingers are inserted in its throat. It eventually dies during a performance when attempting to pronounce the word 'neocolonialism'. In what appears to be a reference to the purges of the 1930s Kataev compares the cat to a gladiator and the host to Caesar. 'Нот - младший брат тигра - обошел, как гладиатор, вокруг пиршественного стола и остановился возле хозяина, словно желая воскликнуть: "Ave Caesar, morituri te salutant!"' (9,166)

The episode of the talking cat demonstrates the strength of Kataev's hatred of the Stalin era and it is not surprising that in 1966 he was one of the twenty five intellectuals who wrote to Mr. Brezhnev warning against rehabilitating Stalin.¹

7.3.3 The Journey to America

The dream of heaven gives way to the major section of the book - Kataev's journey to America.

1. See a report in The Times, 17 March 1966. The signatories included Andrei Sakharov, Petr Kapitsa, Konstantin Paustovskii, Viktor Nekrasov, and Maya Plisetskaya.

The Flight

The flight is described in some detail, with particular attention to the effect of a transatlantic flight on the passage of time. Just as, in Vremya, vpered!, Kataev had related the concept of time to that of space, so here he spends several pages describing the feeling of a loss of time which he experienced during the flight. On the narrative level Kataev's comments on the nature of time serve to emphasise the disorientation of an air traveller. But, as with many details in this work, the remarks about time refer to Kataev's life as a whole as well as to the specific context of the flight. It emerges later that the narrator undertakes this journey partly in order to meet again a woman he had known in his youth, to delve into the recesses of his own past. The flight thus stands as a metaphor for the journey into his own past, and when he cries out 'who will return lost time to me?' this must be understood in a wider sense than that of the actual flight. The transatlantic flight and the anaesthetic for the operation are two symbolic expressions of the same journey, and thus when the narrator cries 'bozhe moi, kuda menya neset!' (9,179) he is referring both to the anaesthetic and to the airplane. However, it must be emphasised that, as with other symbolic details, the flight has a concrete, literal meaning. Each of Kataev's images in this work operates simultaneously on several levels. Thus, the comments about America have a literal meaning as well as playing a role in Kataev's personal reassessment.

This method of multi-level details is nowhere better seen than in the shoe-cleaning episode which begins before the flight and occupies several pages once the narrator is in America. At first the narrator's concern lest the state of his shoes should shame him in a foreign country appears to be a purely ironical detail satirising the sense of inferiority felt by Soviet tourists in the West. But as he returns time and again with increasing compulsion to the state of his shoes, culminating in the mock tragic encounter with the Italian shoe-shine boy, the comic, satirical detail takes on serious overtones. In the state of timelessness into which he is plunged during the flight his shoes alone reflect the passing of time:

Движение времени можно было определить только по блеску обуви, которая постепенно тускнела без всяких видимых причин, просто так, как все в мире. Обувь обнаружила способность стареть. Мои превосходные молодые мокасины на глазах у меня вступали в зрелый возраст, становясь немного более матовыми, чем в юности, но, разумеется, им было еще далеко до вечера, а тем более до ночи с ее непоправимой потертойстью, царапинами, сточенными каблуками и сероватым звездным светом. (9,180)

Later in the book Kataev expresses similar sentiments about the effect of time on his own body, especially his hands. (9,233) Thus, his concern with the state of his shoes appears to symbolise his awareness of the passing of time, and the encounter with the shoe-shine boy is both a real incident (narrated in a brilliantly satirical and self-denigratory style) and, at the same time, one of the network of details relating to the theme of the author's search for the meaning of his life.

Nuclear War

The theme of nuclear war runs throughout the book, but most of the references to it occur during the dream about America. The theme is closely connected to that of the narrator's prescience.

On the journey to America three of Kataev's fellow passengers wear the uniforms of Spearhead forces who operate America's atomic weapons. Their badge appears to be a signal, warning of universal danger (in this respect it resembles the road signs in the early part of the book which act as signals from the future warning of danger to be met). Kataev comments that the badge may be the 'mark of Cain of the nuclear age'. (9,177) Later he refers to submarines carrying atomic rockets and to an underground atomic explosion in Nevada which he detected only because of its effect on the rate of his heart beat. Finally, there are many references to burning, charring, and carbonising - often in strangely incongruous contexts, for example: 'Мы тогда едва выдержали эту духоту, эту страшную, неописуемую жару, как бы прилетевшую откуда-то из Хиросимы. Даже показалось, что на нас начинает обугливаться одежда.' (9,157) Or again: 'Третий солдат не отпечатался в моей памяти; он сидел где-то сзади и все время как бы прятал свое темное, как бы обуглившееся лицо между двух ладоней, приставленных к иллюминатору.' (9,178) Towards the end of the book the narrator sees himself as a winged creature (the connection with Pushkin's 'Prorok' has already been discussed). But his wings are charred ('obuglivshiesya') and incinerated

('ispepelennye'). (9,239,242) Many more examples of the use of these and similar words occur throughout the book.¹

Finally, when the American dream ends and the narrator emerges from his state of unconsciousness, his last dream is of an atomic explosion and fall out, which gradually merges into the reality of the hospital bed, the bottle of blood and the oxygen tubes in his nostrils. The final dream captures the floating sensation of a man emerging from an anaesthetic and at the same time expresses powerfully Kataev's fear of an atomic war, for the sensation appears to be one of disintegration of matter.

It is difficult to say what Kataev means by the references to atomic war in Svyatoi kolodets. Elsewhere in the book his claim to see into the future is undoubtedly a literary device, part of mauvisme. But in view of the theme of nuclear destruction it is possible that a secondary aim of the prescience theme (the signals from the future) is to impress on the reader the risk of total destruction which would end the continuity of life on earth symbolised by the old man at the Holy Well. Another possibility (complementary to the first) is that the entire nuclear destruction theme with the many references to burning is a metaphor for the hell of Stalinism through which the author has lived. This is a tempting thesis, for it brings the nuclear destruction theme into line with another major theme of the work; according to this interpretation the warnings given to Kataev then refer

1. One critic lists fifteen examples. See Alayne P. Reilly, America in Contemporary Soviet Literature (New York, 1971), p. 169.

to a possible return to Stalinism, which was certainly one of the author's pressing fears during the composition of the work.¹

America and Satire

A large part of the section of the book devoted to America is satirical, and it contains some of the most memorable pages in the work. If, in the 1920s, Kataev's satire was softened by his good humour and warmth, then by the 1960s these qualities have disappeared, leaving Kataev a masterly and, at times, cruel satirist. The satire aimed at Prokhindeikin, the Kozlovichi, and his own love of material possessions have already been commented on, and in the American section the targets are similar. The grovelling careerist Prokhindeikin bears a resemblance to the figure of Al'fred Parasyuk, a Soviet bureaucrat, whom the narrator meets in New York. His story of how he fell foul of a 'provocation' is one of the funniest passages in Svyatoi kolodets. It is narrated using a form of skaz which recalls some of Kataev's more successful sketches of the 1920s.

Parasyuk is invited to an important lunch in New York, and he takes great care to dress appropriately:

Слава богу, на отсутствие у себя вкуса пожаловаться не могу. Чего-чего, а за вкус ручаюсь. Сами видите: ни за что не отличишь от иностранца. Верно? Тергалевые брюки двадцать один сантиметр без обшлагов, узкие задние разрезы на пиджаке, нейлоновая сорочка, скромненький галстук с абстрактным рисунком. Тоненькая золоченная цепка. Все о'ней! (9, 196-7)

1. See note 1, p. 400.

However, despite all his care, Parasyuk does make a fool of himself at the luncheon party:

Кончается ленч, лакеи в белых шелковых чулках подают хрустальные мисочки с полосканием. Тут уж, сами понимаете, я стреляный воробей, меня на мякине не проведешь. Знаю, что к чему, ученый. Читал инструкцию. Если после ленча подают тебе мисочку с водой, то боже упаси ее пить, потому что это не лимонад, а полоскание для пальцев. Некоторые наши на этом крупно погорели, но только не я. Беру мисочку и, чтобы все видели, начинаю мыть в ней руки. А это как раз оказался ананасный компот. Понимаете! Так я, вообразите себе, на глазах у всей "Уолдорф Астории" вымыл руки в ананасном компоте, так что он стал даже немного синий, вроде лиловый. (9,197)

There is no lack of humour in the portrait of Parasyuk, but it is an embittered humour very different from that of the 1920s. Kataev ends the story of Parasyuk by exclaiming: 'The talking cat! The talking cat!' (9,197) thereby revealing the depths of his hatred for the Parasyuks of the world.

The lengthy sequence set in Texas is largely satirical, the targets ranging from American television and the degree of automation in American hotels to a Houston cocktail party. There is even an oblique but savage reference to Nikita Khrushchev who appears on American television:

И выступление всемирно известного русского энциентрика с пузатой фигуркой васьки-встаньки и глупо лицемерной улыбкой вокруг злого, щербатого рта; он показывал свой коронный номер: искусство ставить твердую фетровую шляпу в форме перевернутого вверх дном горшка на лысую голову, поддерживая ее одними только ушами. (9,227)

7.3.4 The Russian Widow

Towards the end of the work Kataev develops the motif of the emigre Russian lady, now a widow, whom he had once known and loved when both were adolescents in Odessa. As

with the incident involving Mandel'shtam, the story of the girl whom Kataev had always loved is 'a recollection which became a dream', in other words a real situation which takes on symbolic overtones.

The meeting with the widow undoubtedly took place during Kataev's visit to America. The dramatist Viktor Rozov, who accompanied Kataev to the United States, has written a brief memoir about the trip in which he recalls:

Но если бы я владел даром прозы, я бы написал новеллу о самом авторе [Катаеве], которого наблюдал в это время. Как он ожидал этой встречи, еще будучи в Москве, как по мере приближения к Сан-Франциско предстоящее свидание заполняло его все более и более и он говорил о нем все чаще и чаще. Назалось, худел и юнел с каждым часом. Как в день свидания он был торжествен, переполнен до краев святыми чувствами ...И как явился со свидания опустошенным, вялым, трагическим.¹

Kataev knew this woman when they were both children. He had kissed her only once - at Easter (recalling the atmosphere of Vesennii zvon) but he had fallen in love with her and had loved her all his life. With typical attention to detail, he recalls the moment when he first realised he loved her.

Мы стояли в огромном мире друг перед другом - девочка-гимназистка и мальчик-гимназист - вот она и вот я, - и у меня под черной суконной гимназической курткой с потертыми докрасна серебряными пуговицами, под нижней сорочкой, на худой шее висел эмалевый киевский крестик вместе с холщевой ладанкой, где были зашиты два зуба чеснока, которые, по мнению тети, должны были предохранить меня от скарлатины и других напастей. Увы, они не предохранили меня ни от скарлатины, ни от еще большей напасти - от неразделенной любви на всю жизнь. Но, может быть, все же я просто выдумал эту вечную любовь. (9,204)

The last sentence contains a clue to the relationship between real-life incidents and art in Svyatoi kolodets (as well as in Trava zabven'ya and Kubik). At odd moments, which

1. V. Rozov, 'I ustoyavshimsya ne budet nikogda', Detskaya literatura, 1967, No. 1, p. 23.

occur sporadically through a life-time, life rises to the level of art.¹ Moments which may appear at the time to blend perfectly into the natural flow of life later appear exceptional, like the incidents in a novel. With hindsight these moments stand out from their contexts and take on symbolic value. They are thus both real and symbolic at the same time.² In Svyatoi kolodets such moments include the visit to the restaurant with Nadezhda Mandel'shtam, the drive round Moscow in the company of the children, the moment when, as a boy, Kataev fell in love. Several other examples, notably concerning the girl from the Party school, occur in Trava zabven'ya and will be discussed below.

As the day of the long awaited meeting draws nearer Kataev recalls the last occasion on which he had seen her. It was over forty years previously, shortly after her wedding to a medical student. Kataev, having drunk a good deal of wine, was encouraged by his two friends and fellow drinkers (both of whom subsequently became famous) to visit the young couple and borrow fifty roubles. This incident stands almost like a separate short story within Svyatoi kolodets recalling the atmosphere of early short stories such as Zheleznoe kol'tso.

When they do finally meet again the meeting is a long and emotionally draining one. Kataev longs to ask whether she ever loved him, but cannot break the silence in which he is drowning as in a deep sea. When a conversation does

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1. It is significant that the passage following the one quoted is about the two dimensions of literature - the real and the imagined.
 2. In some of his stories Bunin traces a similar relationship between life and art. See, for example, Solnechnyi udar and Dalekoe.

eventually begin she tells him that her father had kept a photograph of his mother and that he may have loved her all his life. Thus history is repeating itself (a possible indication of the eternal nature of human life which is appropriate to the notion of the old man washing bottles in the Holy Well).

The real incident of the meeting with the Russian widow takes on symbolic overtones. She represents a part of Kataev's personality which turns to the West. The theme of emigration from Russia features prominently in Kataev's work of this period (especially in Trava zabven'ya), and his need to meet the woman again seems to be connected with his own attitude to emigration.¹ Ultimately, of course, there can be no doubt that he does not regret his decision to stay in Russia, but the eagerness with which he awaits the meeting and the emotion with which it fills him testify to the importance of the question. It is significant that of the several expressions of love for his homeland in the book the most eloquent and moving occurs just after he enters the woman's house. The intensely lyrical passage is a reaffirmation of his faith in his homeland and his conviction that, painful as the split in his allegiances may have been, he could not leave Russia:

...вдруг последним усилием воли заставил себя увидеть большое окно, за которым очень красиво, но как-то отвлеченно сияло солнечное русское июньское утро со всеми ее подробностями: верхушками больничного сада, ангельским небом, по которому где-то в районе Нунцева струился нежный, шелестящий свист реактивных двигателей шедшего на посадку самолета, и автострадой, по

1. It is interesting to note that Kataev was not the only author of his generation to turn his thoughts to the subject of emigration at this time. See Leonov's tale Evgenija Ivanovna.

которой я сотни раз в жизни проезжал туда и назад, всякий раз любуясь зрелищем рождения нового мира и многобашенным пирамидальным зданием, напоминавшим по ночам елку с электрическими лампочками. Среди полей, лугов и лесов угадывались химические заводы, космодромы и клетчатые рогатки высоковольтных передач, шагающих во все стороны единственной в мире, неповторимой, трижды благословенной страны моей души, которая дала мне столько восторгов, столько взлетов, падений, разочарований, столько кипучей радости, высоких мыслей, великих и малых дел, любви и ненависти, иногда отчаяния, поэзии, музыки, грубого опьянения и божественно утонченных цветных сновидений... словом, столько всего того, что создало меня - по своему образу и подобию - именно тем, что я есть... (9,235)

The exact significance of the Russian widow, as of much else in Svyatoi kolodets, Trava zabven'ya, and Kubik, is difficult to define. However, as with the figure of Bunin in Trava zabven'ya and Monsieur in Kubik, Kataev appears to be examining one of the crucial moments of his own life - the decision to remain in Russia after the Revolution and support the Soviet regime. As Kataev has recently admitted, this was by no means an easy decision. In a speech to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the October Revolution he said: 'Подавляющее большинство нас, тогда еще совсем молодых, начинающих писателей, выбрало революцию. Не думайте, что было так легко и просто.'¹

He had had one other chance to see her, many years earlier in Paris, but had preferred to listen to Henri Barbusse speaking about the truly international brotherhood of man. In making this choice he again confirmed his ideological stance; his master here is a Mayakovskii rather than a Bunin. Now,

1. Speech by Kataev 19 October 1977, quoted in Literaturnaya gazeta, 26 October 1977.

towards the end of their lives he has his beloved homeland, whereas she has nothing. Her last words to Kataev are:

'У меня здесь больше никого нет. Никого на свете. Я могу жить вполне прилично, но я осталась совсем одна.' (9,241)

Having travelled to America to see the woman he had always loved, Kataev appears to have done much to heal his own wound by excising his fascination with her. The meeting has drained him but has left him convinced of the rightness of his decision. As he is travelling back to Europe he feels:

...чувство сладостной опустошенности, как человек, который нырнул на страшную глубину для того, чтобы поднять со дна мраморную статую богини, и всплыл на поверхность, полумертвый от нечеловеческого напряжения, простирая к небу ладони, в которых среди водорослей и голубого, текущего по рукам песка оказалась всего лишь маленькая, почти черная от времени терракотовая статуетка женщины, вдовы, пролежавшая на дне несколько тысячелетий. (9,243)

In this section of the work Kataev thrice quotes from Poe's ballad 'Ulalume', suggesting that the poem has considerable significance for him. 'Ulalume' is considered by many the greatest of Poe's poems,¹ and is open to many interpretations, but from Kataev's reference to lines 78 - 81 it would appear that the Russian widow is his 'Ulalume', his lost love, now buried forever.

7.3.5 Style

In one of his essays written in the 1950s Kataev had stressed the importance of rhythm in prose writing.² Much

1. Such is the view of T.O. Mabbott, the editor of the latest complete edition of Poe's works. See E.A. Poe, Collected Works (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), vol. 1, p. 409.

2. V. Kataev, 'Novogodnii tost', see note 3, p. 371.

earlier the rhythm of sentences had been one of the major lessons which Kataev had learned from Bunin.¹ Thus, despite the fact that in many works he had used short energetic sentences based on the cadences of speech (particularly in his comic and satirical writing) it was no new departure for Kataev to use in Svyatoi kolodets a preponderance of very long sentences of which the following example is typical:

А я, выходец из совсем другого мира, - как бы попавший в зону душевной невесомости, почти что плавал в своем откинутом кресле где-то на пересечении дня и ночи и, покончив с грейпфрутом и громадными подогретыми тостами сандвичами с консервированной ветчиной и консервированным сыром, который был украшен мокрыми листьями салата и покрыт каракулями майонеза, уже держал в руке до смешного невесомую пластмассовую чашку, куда стюардесса в сексуальной пилотке на обесцвеченных волосах наливала через мое плечо из кувшиноподобного термоса широкую струю тяжелого, как золото, монно, над которым клубился божественно горький пар. (9,200)

Whereas in some of the early works, notably Zimoi, the phrase, and even the single word, had been used as sentences, here the sentence has become a paragraph. Among the noteworthy features of this style is the way in which many nouns are qualified by one or more adjectives which are themselves modified by an adverb or adverbial phrase expressing the author's attitude. Thus the cup is plastic and weightless, but to this latter 'objective' quality Kataev adds the subjective adverb 'ridiculously' ('do smeshnogo'). Thus he simultaneously defines the quality of the object and adds to the picture of his own personality through his personal observation. A further example occurs at the end of the sentence, where the

1. See the discussion of Opyt Krantsa in Chapter two of this dissertation.

steam is 'bitter' (quality) and its bitterness is 'divine' (author's personal view).

The structure of the sentence is complicated, clauses branching out from almost every possible point. The author seems determined to leave nothing to the reader's imagination; he provides detail after detail, adding constantly to the density of the description.¹ It is a style which owes little or nothing to the spoken language, for it is almost impossible to read Kataev's sentences aloud. In this respect it resembles Bunin's mature style of which one critic has said:

Вся проза Бунина обращена к современной книжной речи, ко всем ее достижениям, ко всему, что приобрела эта речь в результате многовекового пути своего развития, особенно к тщательно разработанному ее синтаксису, к сложному разветвленному периоду, оснащённому причастными и деепричастными оборотами и всевозможными иными обособлениями; к системе союзов, способных передать разнообразные оттенки причинно-временных связей...

Любопытно, что со временем эта ориентация на речь книжную, письменную все усиливается. Бунин все охотнее строит фразы, которые нельзя прочесть на одном дыхании, нельзя "сказать", а можно лишь написать - такие, всю разветвленную систему связей в которых можно охватить только взглядом - на книжном листе.²

In Svyatoi kolodets Kataev demonstrates more clearly than ever his affinity with Bunin, although he rarely matches the latter's expressiveness of rhythm. Kataev's preoccupation with

1. This is, of course, not a new feature of Kataev's style. As early as the 1920s Aleksandr Arkhangel'skii had parodied the maximally dense style of Kataev (quoted by B. Sarnov, 'Glazami detstva' in Detskaya literatura 1967 goda (M., 1968), p. 129.)
2. M. Chudakova, Masterstvo Yuriya Oleshi (M., 1972), pp. 30-1. Chudakova makes the very astute remark that much of Kataev's later prose appears to be a stylisation of Bunin's literary language. 'И уже как откровенная стилизация под эту прозу, с ее сугубо книжным, логизированным синтаксисом и с ее "наглядностью", изобразительностью выглядят многие позднейшие страницы В. Катаева.' (p. 31)

the rhythm of his prose reaches its height in Kubik, which is constructed much as a piece of music might be.

The language of Svyatoi kolodets contains many non-Russian words, particularly words of English origin. To a certain extent this may be explained by the setting in America, but it is noteworthy that whereas in Khutorok v stepi, part of which had a foreign setting, foreign words were invariably followed by the Russian translation, in the works of the 1960s - Malen'kaya zheleznaya dver' v stene and Svyatoi kolodets - the foreign words are very rarely glossed. It is assumed that the reader knows these words, just as it is assumed that he will recognise the quotations from Mayakovskii and Mandel'shtam¹ and the references to Western culture (such as the films of Fellini or the poetry of Poe).² Towards the end of the book Kataev describes Svyatoi kolodets as 'a book for the few'. Whereas he had earlier written for a mass readership he now addresses himself to the relatively few people able to understand his references.³ This is part of the ostentatious display which Kataev openly engages in and builds in to his view of literature in the 1960s. If the style of Svyatoi kolodets renders it less accessible to a wide readership than Volny Chernogo morya then this is by design.

1. Some of Kataev's references to Mandel'shtam have been discussed above. A further oblique reference may be contained in the motif of the forgotten word which could save the world (9,242) c.f. Mandel'shtam's poem 'Ya slovo pozabyi, chto ya khotel skazat'', Sobranie sochinenii v dvukh tomakh, vol. 1, p. 81.
2. In some respects Svyatoi kolodets owes much to the film style of Fellini. The interweaving of dream and reality; the juxtaposition of contrasting scenes; the blurring of the line between art and life; the underlying theme of the search for the meaning of life and the place within it of art - all of these features are common to Svyatoi kolodets and the films of Fellini. At one point Kataev appears to acknowledge his debt to the Italian director by introducing into his work Giulietta Masina, Fellini's wife and the star of some of his films. (9,151)
3. Compare this with the views expressed in the article 'Izgnanie metafory' (see Chapter five of this dissertation).

7.4 Trava zabven'ya

7.4.1 Genesis of the Work

In an interview which he gave to the newspaper Literatura i zhizn' in January 1962 Kataev named Bunin and Mayakovskii as the two greatest influences on his work. Two years later he began work on Trava zabven'ya, a book which is, on one level, a memoir about those two poets, but which has as its principal theme Kataev's own literary development. In the 1962 interview he characterised Bunin in the following terms:

На первый взгляд, он был сухой, желчный, язвительный человек. Но стоило побыть с ним побольше, немного раскрыть "тайники души", и Бунин становился таким, каким мы знаем его по книгам: Мягким, лиричным, изумительно наблюдательным,¹ истинным художником, даже в мелочах.

Several of the features mentioned in this character sketch are developed fully in the portrait of Bunin which occupies most of the first part of Trava zabven'ya.

After mentioning briefly the importance of Bunin in his own development, Kataev goes on in the interview to discuss the second great influence on him: 'Вторая [встреча] - с Владимиром Маяковским. Может показаться странным, но я считаю себя учеником не только Бунина, но и Маяковского. Без него, без его стихов не представляю себе революции.'² It is worth noting that here, as in Trava zabven'ya, Kataev assesses Mayakovskii's influence as primarily ideological. The poet's work helped Kataev towards his present view of the

1. R. Pospelov, 'Beseda s V. Kataevym', Literatura i zhizn', 31 January 1962.

2. R. Pospelov, 'Beseda...'.

Revolution.

Trava zabven'ya was written over a period of three years, overlapping with Svyatoi kolodets. It appears to be a literary memoir like Erenburg's Lyudi, gody, zhizn' or Fedin's Gor'kii sredi nas, but although it does present very striking portraits of Mayakovskii and, particularly, Bunin, it differs from other literary memoirs of the period in being as much, if not more concerned with the author himself.¹

7.4.2 Structure

The structure of Trava zabven'ya supports the view that the central theme is Kataev's own literary development. As with Svyatoi kolodets and Malen'kaya zheleznaya dver' v stene, there are no formal divisions within the work, but the apparently random exposition of material (which appears to depend largely on free association) is an illusion. In fact, the work consists of two major sections devoted to Bunin and Mayakovskii respectively, with a link passage about an adventure which befell Kataev during the Civil War, and a final brief section in which Kataev returns to the figure of Bunin with whom he had begun the work. In addition, he turns several times in the course of the book to the story of Klavdiya Zaremba, the girl from the Party school, who binds together Bunin, Mayakovskii, and Kataev himself. Thus, while at first sight Trava zabven'ya appears to consist of two parts about

1. Several critics of Trava zabven'ya were offended by Kataev's focus on himself. See, for example, A. Subbotin, 'Novaya zhizn' Mayakovskogo', Ural, 1968, No. 7, pp. 120-7.

the two poets, its structure is quite complex, and the two major sections are held together by the figure of Kataev, or his alter ego. Both Bunin and Mayakovskii are depicted primarily in their relationship with Kataev, and he emphasises those aspects of the work and personalities of the two poets which influenced him, making no attempt to include other points of view unless they support his picture. The author's aim in Trava zabven'ya is to explore the apparent paradox of the influence on him of two such totally different writers as Bunin and Mayakovskii.

7.4.3 'Stereoscopic' Description

In general, Bunin's influence on Kataev was aesthetic, whereas Mayakovskii's was ideological, but near the beginning of Trava zabven'ya Kataev reveals that both poets exerted an aesthetic influence on him. Both taught him the need to depict concrete scenes in poetry. Until he read Bunin's poetry Kataev's own verses had been full of purely conventional descriptions inspired more by literary models than by any actual experience. But a poem by Bunin in which a seagull floating on the water is compared to a fisherman's float suddenly revealed to the young Kataev 'the simple secret of poetry':

Но тут была, во-первых, не бухта, а бухточка
и, во-вторых, не вообще бухточка, а скалистая,
то есть такая, какую я много раз видел где-нибудь
в Аркадии или на Малом Фонтане и любовался ею,
никак не предполагая, что именно она и есть
предмет поэзии. (9,264)

The accuracy of Bunin's description of the seagull is called by Kataev 'stereoscopic', and it was to become an ideal to be aimed at all his life. Bunin's poem with its 'stereoscopic

vision' opened for Kataev 'a new world, the miracle of poetry'.

Yet although Bunin and Mayakovskii stand opposed in Trava zabven'ya, the first lesson which Kataev learned from Mayakovskii was the same as that learned from Bunin. Without even knowing the name of the author, Kataev read in 1913 or 1914 a poem by Mayakovskii which produced a similar effect on him to that produced by Bunin's stereoscopic poem. One line, in particular, from Mayakovskii's poem 'Port' struck Kataev forcefully. 'В ушах оглохших пароходов горели серьги якорей.' He tells how the poem, and especially this line, brought before his eyes an astonishingly clear picture of a port, which remained in his consciousness alongside Bunin's seagull:

Я даже не запомнил фамилии футуриста,
написавшего эти строчки, но картина порта,
созданная его могучим воображением, навсегда
врезалась в память где-то рядом с поплавком
бунинской чайки. (9,275)

The fact that both Bunin and Mayakovskii taught Kataev the purely aesthetic lesson of the miracle of real poetry is of considerable importance, for it reveals that true artistry is compatible with an ideologically committed stance, at least for a poet of the stature of Mayakovskii. Without the mention of the purely aesthetic impact of Mayakovskii's poetry the figures of Bunin and Mayakovskii might have been interpreted as symbolising artistry on the one hand and a committed ideological stance on the other. But in Trava zabven'ya Bunin does not have a monopoly of poetic artistry, although it is undeniable that the stereoscopic vision which so thrilled

Kataev belongs, above all, to Bunin, and that the major lesson learned from Mayakovskii is ideological.

In the course of his recollections of Bunin in the early part of the work Kataev attempts to define the essence of the latter's descriptive powers.

Сила Бунина-изобразителя заключалось в поразительно быстрой, почти мгновенной реакции на все внешние раздражители и в способности тут же найти для них совершенно точное словесное выражение. (9,309)

It is interesting to note that in his work of the 1960s Kataev himself strives to emulate this aspect of Bunin's writing. Time after time in Svyatoi kolodets and Trava zabven'ya he speaks of reacting to stimuli from the physical world around him, and in Kubik he was to develop this notion even further.¹ Yet, while examples may be most numerous in Kataev's work of the 1960s, his story Muzyka reveals that as early as 1918 he was aware of the nature of Bunin's descriptive powers and that he sought to emulate them. At one point in Trava zabven'ya Kataev himself becomes the object of Bunin's mercilessly close scrutiny.²

Он стоял передо мной, по-прежнему сухой, желчный, столичный, недоступный - мой прежний Ив. Бунин, о котором я все эти годы - даже на артиллерийском наблюдательном пункте - не переставал думать и который как бы стал постоянным контрольным органом моего художественного сознания, и - отступая на шаг - молчаливо рассматривал меня во всех подробностях, будто собирался тут же, не сходя с места, описать.

- Вы меня узнали? - спросил я.

Он ничего не ответил - мне даже показалось, не услышал моего вопроса, - и продолжал рассматривать

1. For example, a passage in Trava zabven'ya reads: 'На мою душу постоянно воздействуют извне миллионы осязаемых и неосязаемых раздражителей, которые вдруг начинают со страшной настойчивостью требовать, чтобы я воплотил их в нечто материальное, объемное.' (9,371)
2. The word 'mercilessly' is Kataev's. He says of Bunin: 'Бунин был невероятно любопытен, и ему нужно было всегда, во всех подробностях знать окружающую его жизнь, видеть все своими беспощадно зоркими глазами.' (9,301)

- я бы даже не побоялся сказать - читать меня,
делая иногда как бы мысленные пометки на полях.
(9,276-7)

As a pupil of Bunin, Kataev has also mastered the art of instantly finding the right words to depict a person or object in a few telling details. His first description of Bunin is in terms which the older writer might have used - a few physical details conveying the essence of the portrait. Although he professes to love Bunin, he does not allow that to affect his description, which is dispassionate. He approaches the physical description of Bunin as he would any other person or object, that is with curiosity and a determination to find the right words. It is one of the puzzling features of Trava zabven'ya that whereas, towards the end of the book, Kataev criticises Bunin for allowing his work to become mere imaginative gymnastics, he himself clearly imitates, or perhaps even parodies, Bunin's search for the correct word. In order to demonstrate the coldly accurate approach of Bunin, Kataev quotes from Lika:

Я до боли держу голову закинутой назад, не
свожу с него глаз и все стараюсь понять, когда
оно, сияя, вдруг выкатывается из туч: Каков оно?
Белая маска с мертвеца? Все изнутри светящееся,
но какое? Стеариновое? Да, да, стеариновое!
Так и скажу где-нибудь. (9,432)¹

Within a few pages of the quoted passage Kataev depicts himself as a similarly dispassionate seeker after mots justes. With callous lack of feeling he searches for a word which will capture the essence of the aged widow of Bunin.

1. The passage from Bunin's work may be found in Zhizn' Arsen'eva, Sobranie sochinenii, vol. 6, p. 235. It is interesting that this passage should so closely resemble that about Bunin at the end of Kataev's story Muzyka.

...а я смотрел на нее с тем тревожным вниманием, с каким некогда молодой Бунин смотрел на луну, желая возможно точнее определить, какая она? Стеариновая?

Мне кажется, я нашел определение того белого цвета, который доминировал во всем облике Веры Николаевны. Цвет белой мыши с розоватыми глазами. (9,436)¹

It seems likely that the reference to the white mouse is a deliberate stylised imitation of Bunin (hence the second reference to Lika). In juxtaposing such a totally unfeeling description of Vera Nikolaevna and Bunin's own description of the moon as 'stearin' Kataev appears to be questioning the morality of Bunin's dedication to dispassionate description. Yet, despite the attempt to involve Bunin through the juxtaposition, the comparison of Vera Nikolaevna to a white mouse belongs to Kataev, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that he himself has sacrificed all human feeling in the search for accuracy of description.² Bunin's stereoscopic descriptions lead Kataev to a cold, if perhaps, accurate description of Bunin's widow.

7.4.4 The Limitations of Bunin's View of Art

Kataev still considers himself to be a pupil of Bunin and throughout the 1960s he continues to try to emulate the great writer's plasticity. Yet he feels himself to be Bunin's pupil only in certain aspects of the writer's craft. The great limitation of Bunin's work, according to Kataev, is the absence

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1. This passage was severely criticised by some critics, notably B. Sarnov, 'Ugl' pylayushchii...'.
 2. It is possible that this is what Kataev means when he speaks of being burned to ashes. 'Нак я мечтал тогда, чтобы мое сердце сгорело до черноты! Но я не представлял себе, как это страшно.' (9,306)

of 'external moral pressure'. (9,433) In the absence of an ideology Bunin cannot cope with what Goethe calls 'the thousand-headed hydra of empiricism'.¹ Bunin's problem, as portrayed by Kataev, recalls that of Georgii Vasil'evich from Vremya, vpered! before he was supplied with the key to the rebus. He saw thousands of people and objects and could describe them but could not make sense of the activity. Significantly, Georgii Vasil'evich at first trained binoculars on the site at Magnitogorsk trying to pick out individual details, which made the overall picture even less accessible. (The stereoscopic effect of Bunin's description of the seagull is compared by Kataev to looking through binoculars.) Georgii Vasil'evich eventually begins to understand the rebus of Magnitogorsk when he becomes emotionally involved, when he adopts a committed stance towards the construction of the power station. It is one of the messages of Trava zabven'ya that Kataev was saved from the hydra of empiricism by the ideological lesson which he learned from Mayakovskii.

А Революции меня учил Маяковский. (9,432)

Но наше русское - мое - поколение не было потерянным. Оно не погибло, хотя и могло погибнуть. Война его искалечила, но Великая Революция спасла и вылечила. Какой бы я ни был, я обязан своей жизнью и своим творчеством Революции. Только Ей одной.

Я сын Революции. Может быть, и плохой сын. Но все равно сын. (9,331)

It is no coincidence that Magnitogorsk and Vremya, vpered! play such a major role in Trava zabven'ya, for it was above all with that novel that Kataev finally established himself as a Soviet

1. Goethe's phrase occurs in a letter to Schiller, 17 August 1797. It recurs several times in Kataev's work. See, for example 'Novogodnii tost' (8,345) where a misprint distorts the quotation (tysyacheglazaya gidra).

author, a son of the Revolution. One of those largely responsible for providing Kataev with the key which enabled him to defeat empiricism was Mayakovskii, who made him a gift of the title.

7.4.5 Kataev's Position between Bunin and Mayakovskii

Although Bunin and Mayakovskii stand at opposite poles from each other and Kataev could not mention the name of the one in the presence of the other without provoking a violent reaction, they were equally important influences on Kataev. One of the indications of this comes with the position between the sections devoted to Bunin and Mayakovskii of the story of Ryurik Pchelkin, who is Kataev's alter ego. He chooses to ascribe the story of his own narrow escape from death during the Civil War to Ryurik Pchelkin because he is aware that after so many years the figure he draws will be the image he now has of himself when young and that this may not coincide exactly with the truth.

Этот молодой человек - совсем еще на вид
юноша - был я.

Вернее сказать, он мог быть мною, если бы
я обладал силой воскресить себя того, давнего,
молодого... Но так как у меня нет этой волшебной
силы, то сейчас, когда пишутся эти строчки, я
могу считать его лишь некоторым воплощением
моего теперешнего представления обо мне самом
того времени... (9,341)

To a large extent Kataev's use of an alter ego here is a literary device, but it does shed light on other instances of the use of real incidents in fictionalised form. As in the two previous works Kataev here develops his view that certain

moments in life reach the level of art and that with hindsight it is possible to see their significance in literary terms. As he puts it at one point in Trava zabven'ya: 'И мы снова ненадолго потеряли из виду друг друга, а жизнь, на миг превратившись в страницу Гюго, опять потекла своей чередой.' (9,326)

Pchelkin, a young Odessan poet, is sent to the neighbouring country districts to recruit correspondents for his newspaper. He carries out his duties conscientiously, but is really more concerned with poetry, his own and that of Bunin and Mandel'shtam. As his mission is nearing an end he falls into the hands of a terrorist band and is lucky to escape with his life. The man with whom he had been travelling is not so fortunate and is executed by the terrorists. A false report of Pchelkin's death reaches Odessa and his father, on hearing it, suffers a stroke and dies.

The story accords with that published in Kataev's autobiography and also, in most particulars, with the story of Petr Sinaiskii in Otets.¹ The significance of its position in Trava zabven'ya is that Pchelkin is a poet, an admirer and pupil of Bunin, who spends most of his time composing verses or reciting those of Bunin and Mandel'shtam. Yet, he is working for the Revolution; in this respect he bears a closer resemblance to Mayakovskii than to Bunin.

1. It is also worth noting that the section immediately before the introduction of Pchelkin resembles another story of the 1920s - Ser Genri i chert - in that it is an attempt to convey the effect on Kataev of the typhus fever which he suffered in 1920.

7.4.6 Klavdiya Zaremba

A similar indication of Kataev's position midway between Bunin and Mayakovskii is provided by the story of Klavdiya Zaremba, the girl from the Party school. Significantly, it is Bunin who first impels Kataev to describe the girl, for he tells his pupil to describe a sparrow in a way which will express his own feelings rather than repeat those of any other writer, however great.

Но пишите так, как вы чувствуете, и так, как вы видите, а не так, как до вас чувствовали и видели другие поэты, пусть даже самые гениальные. Будьте в искусстве независимы. Этому можно научиться. И тогда перед вами откроется неисчерпаемый мир подлинной поэзии. (9,270)

Kataev tries to act on Bunin's advice. He describes the sparrow, then turns to a little girl in order to describe her in the same way. But he feels that there is in her something which demands to be expressed not by exquisite lyric poetry but by an epic or a tragedy.

Всей душой я вдруг почувствовал в ней не просто девочку, а трагическую героиню какого-то подлинного, а не выдуманного назревающего, будущего романа. ...чудо мгновенного превращения пейзажа в эпос, в трагедию. (9,271)

The little girl whom Kataev tried to describe in a poem in response to Bunin's lesson turns out to be Klavdiya Zaremba, the girl from the Party school, the tragic heroine of a novel which Kataev longed all his life to write, but never did. 'Describe a sparrow', said Bunin, and as a result Kataev was led to the figure of Klavdiya Zaremba, in whom landscape demanded to be transformed into epic, into tragedy.

Kataev's other teacher, Mayakovskii, also led him to the figure of Klavdiya Zaremba, for he told him to write about

Magnitogorsk, and Zarembo was in Magnitogorsk at the same time as Kataev. Thus the advice from two completely antithetical poets leads Kataev from different ends to the central figure of Klavdiya Zarembo.

The story of Zarembo is based on a real incident. During the period when he was working for YugROSTA and UkrROSTA at the beginning of the 1920s Kataev's editor was 'the indomitable Sergei Ingulov'. In the autumn of 1921 Ingulov published in the Khar'kov newspaper Kommunist a cycle of sketches entitled 'Lyudi v revolyutsii', one of which was 'Devushka iz sovpартshkoly'.¹ It told the story of a girl who, acting on the instructions of the Cheka, had befriended and then fallen in love with a counter-revolutionary agent. When she had gathered information against him he was arrested and shot. She had sacrificed her love for the sake of the Revolution. Ingulov urged writers to seek inspiration from such incidents from Soviet life. Kataev quotes from Ingulov's article in Kommunist:

"Писатели и писательницы, трагики и поэты, акмеисты и неоклассики, о ком рассказываете вы нам? Вы художники, вы не можете не воспринимать революционного быта, жизни - не классов, не слов, не групп, - отдельных людей в революции..."

"Поэты и поэтессы, вы сумели воспеть любовь Данте и Беатриче, разве вам не постичь трагической любви штабс-капитана и девушки из партшколы?"

"Почему же вы молчите?" (9,372)

In Ingulov's article the girl from the Party school was not named, but Kataev gave her the name Klavdiya Zarembo,

1. S. Ingulov, 'Devushka iz sovpартshkoly', Kommunist (Khar'kov), 2 October 1921. I have been unable to read this article. It is referred to in L. Skorino, Pisatel' i ego vremya, p. 168.

thereby transforming her from a real person into a creature of his imagination. Like the Russian widow in Svyatoi kolodets, Zaremba is an example of real life rising to the level of art. She becomes a symbolic figure whose fate is bound up with that of Kataev himself. The fact that her name is invented by the author assumes considerable importance, for it epitomises his relationship to his work. The ant which crawls over the flower and on to his arm reacts to the various stimuli surrounding it, but because it has neither imagination nor the ability to confer names it is different from the author. He, too, reacts to the stimuli of the world around him, but, having been stimulated by a physical experience, he converts that experience into art.¹

Such a view of the nature of artistic creativity accords perfectly with the passage from Svyatoi kolodets in which Kataev takes issue with Maurois. (9,204) According to this view an author needs descriptive powers and imagination in equal measure; his work should be based on reality, but should contain an element of fantasy which will express his uniqueness. Thus, the girl from the Party school really existed and her story so moved Kataev that it demanded to be given artistic form; it provided the external stimulus. But his artistic vision transformed the facts, even to the extent of conferring on the girl a name. (Kataev emphasises the degree of his control over his character by revealing his deliberations over the choice of name and by making it such an unusual one:

1. Kataev expresses such views several times in the course of Trava zabven'ya, but the longest such passages are on 9,370-1 and 9,249-51.

'Наконец я сам дал ей имя: Клавдия Заремба. Да, именно так: Клавдия Заремба. Или Зарембо?' (9,370)

7.4.7 The Angel of Death

The story of Klavdiya Zarembo and Petya Solov'ev, the counter-revolutionary agent with whom she falls in love and whom she betrays to the Cheka, should have formed the subject matter of a novel entitled Angel smerti which Kataev wanted to write (following Ingulov's exhortation) and to which he turned many times, but which, in the end, he was unable to write. Trava zabven'ya is, in part, an adumbration of that unwritten novel.

Книга, которую я сейчас пишу, есть в какой-то мере "история собственного произведения" - точнее, одного из моих произведений, романа "Ангел смерти", который я мечтал написать всю свою жизнь, но так и не написал. И он навсегда остался лишь моей мечтой. (9,273)

Why, then, did Kataev never write the book of his dreams?

He himself answers that question in the following way:

Сколько раз я брался за перо, чтобы исполнить совет покойного моего друга и старшего товарища Сергея Ингулова и написать роман о девушке из совпартшколы. Может быть, это был единственный настоящий сюжет, алмаз, который стоило, не жалея времени и сил, огранить, превратив в сверкающий брильянт. Но каждый раз я чувствовал свое бессилие: тема была во много раз выше меня и ее нельзя было обработать так себе, в старой манере, которой она никак не поддавалась.

Девушку из совпартшколы нужно было писать совершенно по-новому, небывало и, как сказал бы Осип Мандельштам, "на разрыв аорты". А я еще к этому не был готов. (9,378-9)

This extract contains two related admissions about the nature of Kataev's work. Firstly, the reference to a subject

which demanded to be polished up without regard to the time and effort involved until it shone like a diamond brings to mind Mandel'shtam's poetry with its brilliant, diamond-like quality. This impression is reinforced by the explicit mention of Mandel'shtam later in the passage. The subject of the girl from the Party school deserves to be treated as Mandel'shtam treated his subjects, that is with an intensity 'fit to burst the aorta'.¹ Kataev admits that he was never prepared to invest so much in the work (although the word eshche in the final sentence of the passage suggests that he may now feel ready to try).

Secondly, the subject of the girl from the Party school is 'many times greater' than Kataev himself. The question must be asked: why is this subject, which appears in no way extraordinary, so demanding for Kataev? Why is he touched so deeply by the tale of the girl from the Party school? A possible answer to these questions emerges from the fact that when, at last, Kataev did write about the girl who betrayed her lover out of loyalty to the Revolution he did so within the framework of a book devoted in large measure to his own relationship with Bunin and Mayakovskii. It is tempting to suppose that the story of Klavdiya Zarembo moved Kataev so deeply because it reflects his own treatment of Bunin. Sergei Ingulov's article 'Devushka iz sovparktshkoly' appeared in the Khar'kov newspaper Kommunist on 2 October 1921. By a curious

1. The significance for Kataev of Mandel'shtam's phrase na razryv aorty is emphasised by the repetition of the phrase (and the entire stanza from which it is taken) at the very end of Trava zabven'ya. (9,446) The phrase comes from Mandel'shtam's poem 'Skripachka' (1935), Sobranie sochinenii, vol. 1, pp. 196-7.

coincidence Kataev's story Zolotoe pero, which satirised Bunin, was first published in the same issue of Kommunist. The writing of Zolotoe pero, in which he attacks his beloved Bunin, is for Kataev the equivalent to Klavdiya Zarembo's act of sacrificing her lover for the cause of the Revolution. Just as Klavdiya Zarembo falls in love with Petya Solov'ev, and never ceases to love him, even after betraying him, so does Kataev continue to love Bunin. In Trava zabven'ya he admits: 'Я продолжал его [Бунина] страстно любить. Не хочу прибавлять: как художника. Я любил его полностью, и как человека, как личность тоже.' (9,327) Or again: 'Без преувеличения могу сказать, что вся моя жизнь была пронизана мечтой еще хоть раз увидаться с Буниным.' (9,429)

The ambiguous relationship between Klavdiya Zarembo and Petya Solov'ev resembles that between Kataev and Bunin in Trava zabven'ya. Thus, alongside Klavdiya's abiding love for Petya there is her recognition of a greater love for the Revolution and her ability to see Petya's attitude as treachery. Kataev has her write shortly before her death:

Может быть, больше никогда не увидимся. Одному тебе признаюсь перед смертью: я любила его и не забывала ни на минуту всю свою жизнь. Ты знаешь кого. Но моя совесть перед нашей Революцией и перед собой чиста: не я его предала, а он предал Родину. (9,441)

Similarly, Kataev professes his love for Bunin but at the same time attempts to justify his own betrayal of Bunin (in Zolotoe pero) by depicting the great author as an Esau who has sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. Towards the end of Trava zabven'ya he writes: 'Я понял: Бунин променял две самые драгоценные вещи - Родину и Революцию - на чечевичную похлебку

так называемой свободы и так называемой независимости.'

(9,431)¹

Further minor details in the identification of Klavdiya Zarembo with Kataev himself and Petya Solov'ev with Bunin include the fact that when a group of sailors and soldiers come to arrest Bunin, only to find that he has a decree of immunity, (an event which formed the climax of Zolotoe pero) Klavdiya Zarembo is among them; (9,326) and that when Kataev at last goes to visit the grave of Bunin he meets Petya Solov'ev, who escaped the Angel of Death and now works as a cemetery attendant in Paris. Of course, the comparisons between Klavdiya Zarembo and Kataev on the one hand, and Bunin and Petya Solov'ev on the other cannot be extended to cover the entire story of the girl from the Party school. But there is enough evidence to provide an answer to the question posed above. This subject would have been the most important of Kataev's career because it touched on one of the most important aspects of his own life.

Kataev was unable to write Angel smerti because he could not write na razryv aorty, and also because his old manner of writing could not be adapted to accommodate such a subject. It required an approach to the conventions of literature which he has only now acquired: 'Короче говоря, нужно было быть не Бунинным, а по крайней мере Маяковским.' (9,379) From the context in which this sentence appears it is clear that it refers primarily to Mayakovskii as a

1. This harsh judgement on Bunin was criticised by some commentators on the work. See, for example, B. Sarnov, 'Ugl' pylayushchii...'. The present interpretation helps to explain, if not to condone, Kataev's ambiguous attitude to Bunin.

stylistic innovator, but it also implies something about political attitude. In this sentence no less important than the names Bunin and Mayakovskii is the phrase po krainei mere. In order to do justice to a subject like that of Angel smerti one must be not a Bunin but at least a Mayakovskii. Herein lies a clue to a very important theme in Trava Zabven'ya which will be examined in the next section.

7.4.8 Kataev's Independence

Many times in the course of the present work reference has been made to the influence of Bunin and Mayakovskii on Kataev, but in Trava zabven'ya, while acknowledging fully his debt to both poets, Kataev stresses that he has not remained merely a pupil. He has found his own unique vision and voice. He makes this point in the form of the fable about the pillow.

A king who suffers from insomnia is on the point of death when his youngest wife discovers that the reason for his inability to sleep is that his pillow is too hard. She removes some of the stuffing from the pillow and the king is able to sleep. However, the pillow is now so comfortable that he falls asleep immediately, and thus loses the benefit of those minutes before sleep when he used to ponder the problems of his kingdom. At his request his youngest wife adds a handful of down to the pillow and the king is able to think about the problems facing his kingdom and then sleep soundly. In this fable Kataev appears to be saying that for him the ideal approach to literature is neither that of Bunin nor that

of Mayakovskii, but somewhere in between. As has been shown above, this conclusion is supported by the structure of Trava zabven'ya in which the tale of Ryurik Pchelkin occupies the central position.

Bunin himself advised Kataev to try to achieve total creative independence.

Бунин говорил...о совершенно самостоятельном видении окружающего, не связанном с подражанием кому-нибудь, будь то хоть сам Лев Толстой или Пушкин, то есть об умении видеть явления и предметы совершенно самостоятельно и писать о них абсолютно по-своему, вне каких бы то ни было литературных влияний и реминисценций.
(9,306-7)

The basic theme of Trava zabven'ya is not really the influence of Bunin and Mayakovskii on Kataev but his achievement of creative independence via a synthesis of the lessons learned from both poets.

7.5 Kubik

While Kataev frequently asserts in Malen'kaya zheleznaya dver' v stene, Svyatoi kolodets, and Trava zabven'ya that he is a Soviet author, 'a son of the Revolution', the fundamental tenor of all three works, particularly the middle one, is aesthetic rather than hortatory, private rather than public. Despite the subject matter of Lenin and the Paris commune in Malen'kaya zheleznaya dver' v stene and the extensive portraits of Bunin and Mayakovskii in Trava zabven'ya, all three works are unified (both individually and as a group) by the figure of the author himself which is never far from the foreground. This tendency of Kataev's work of the 1960s culminates in his last tale of the decade, Kubik, published in Novyi mir in February 1969.

7.5.1 Genesis and Links with Beleet parus odinokii

Kubik appears to have been originally envisaged as a tale for children involving a love story between a boy, Pchelkin, and a girl, Marusya, and the early pages of the finished work lead the reader to believe that Kataev is once again exploring the familiar territory of the complex emotions and peculiar dialogue of children tentatively entering into a relationship with each other.¹ Several of the minor details from the first few pages of Kubik recall similar details from Elektricheskaya mashina and, especially, Beleet parus odinokii. For example, the boy boasts to the girl that he can kill a sparrow in flight with his catapult, a boast similar to that made by Rudol'f Karlovich, the rifle range owner, in Beleet parus odinokii.² Pchelkin's imagination has clearly been fired by English detective novels, and, like Petya Bachei, he retreats into a fantasy world of play based on his reading. After breaking the lamp, Pchelkin is seized by the ear and marched home by an irate janitor just as Gavrik is held by the ear by the moustachioed policeman in Beleet parus odinokii. The observation about a free bird being captured and becoming instantly 'goods for sale' recalls a similar paragraph in the first (Krasnaya nov') edition of Beleet parus odinokii which was omitted from all subsequent editions.³

1. See a note about the projected work in Vechernyaya Moskva, 20 May 1967. In the finished tale the girl's name was Sanya.

2. Compare 9,453 with 5,98-9.

3. Compare these two passages: 'В этом есть какое-то наваждение, колдовство. Превращение бесплатной, свободной птицы в товар, имеющий рыночную стоимость, в детские годы мучительно терзало мое воображение, мой слабый, невинный ум, еще незнакомый со знаменитой формулой Маркса насчет сюртука и холста.' (Kubik, 9,464) and 'Все эти прекрасные дары природы были превращены в товар, в громадные, безликие партии товара, в предмет купли и продажи.' (Beleet parus odinokii, Krasnaya nov', 1936, No. 5, p. 19)

7.5.2 The Plot

Yet, despite such echoes and the similarity between the dialogues on the opening pages of Kubik and those between Petya, Gavrik and Motya in Beleet parus odinokii, it very quickly becomes clear that Kataev's intention in the later work is entirely different from that of 1936. First of all, as in Trava zabven'ya, the opening paragraph consists of a single very short sentence contained within two sets of three dots. Thus, the illusion is created that Kataev catches his thoughts in mid-stream, and that the work which follows is a series of random scenes and reflections. Secondly, Kataev identifies himself with the boy, at least partially:

Неужели этот мальчик тоже я? Если и не вполне, то, во всяком случае, отчасти. Не исключено, что это все тот же милый моему сердцу Пчелкин, только совсем маленький, лет восьми. (9,451)

Thirdly, the consistency of tone and importance of narration in Beleet parus odinokii are absent in Kubik. The story of Pchelkin and San'ka and the mysterious letters OV is interrupted by a lengthy passage about the importance of the concept of sound in literature which disorientates the reader whose expectations of a tale in the tradition of Kataev's best work for children had been raised by the opening of the story. Thus, when Kataev eventually abandons young Pchelkin and San'ka and turns to other narrative strands it is not entirely unexpected.

Young Pchelkin becomes Monsieur the Former Boy, a rich French business man of Russian origin who returns to Odessa as a tourist and discovers that the letters OV which had so fascinated him as a boy stand for nothing more exotic than

Odessa water works (odesskii vodoprovod). The tale then shifts to encompass a love story in the style of Maupassant in which Monsieur the Former Boy conducts an affair with a poor though handsome woman who struggles to bring up her only daughter decently. Monsieur pays her well, but after her sudden death at an early age he discovers that she had not cashed any of his cheques or sold any of his expensive gifts. On her side the motivation for the affair had been true love. The story next shifts to the wedding of this poor widow's daughter to a fellow student, a young man from a rich family. Using the technique which he had introduced in Malen'kaya zheleznaya dver' v stene of accompanying his heroes to places which he himself knew well, describing those places from his own point of view and then ascribing experiences similar to his own to his heroes, Kataev makes the young French couple spend their honeymoon in Rumania and Bulgaria (which allows him to give a detailed description of the baptism of a group of Rumanian infants which he himself had witnessed in the company of his friend, the Rumanian artist Francesca Bukovale). Similarly, in Bulgaria the young French couple see and admire the golden crown of a Thracian princess which had been found while the foundations for a new building were being dug in 1966.

After the death of his mistress, Monsieur the Former Boy seeks solace in travel, and one of the places he visits is East Germany. This gives Kataev a reason to incorporate the famous story of Luther throwing an inkwell at the Devil. After a long and important section devoted to the relationship between words and objects Kataev returns to Monsieur and

Madame and their black poodle named Kubik. While Monsieur and Madame are staying at a hotel in Monte Carlo there is a strike of power workers during which Kubik bites a Corsican waiter named Napoleon. The latter allows himself to be placated by the gift of a few expensive ties and later bitterly regrets his inability to get a large sum from Monsieur in compensation.

Finally, the tale ends in Paris during a period of social conflict which may be the disturbances of May 1968. Napoleon, enraged and embittered by his failure to seize his opportunity of riches, becomes involved with criminals and sinks slowly into drunkenness and squalor. Monsieur goes down to his cellar for a bottle of mineral water and suffers a stroke or heart attack during which he sees again the letters OV which had so fascinated him as a boy.

This brief account of the main episodes in Kubik demonstrates that the tale has no unifying plot, and even the figure of Monsieur the Former Boy serves to unify it only in the most general sense. If it begins by resembling Beleet parus odinokii this resemblance soon vanishes to be replaced by faint echoes of other works. For example, the character of Napoleon recalls that of Zosin in Opyt Krantsa; the conflict between capitalists and striking workers had formed the subject matter of Ostrov Erendorf and Povelitel' zheleza; the compelling account of the mania which seizes a man gambling at the roulette wheel continues a line of such portraits stretching back to Opyt Krantsa and encompassing many of

Kataev's best works; the sensuous description of the gambling chips resembles the picture of the bank note in Elektricheskaya mashina.

7.5.3 Musical Construction

Thus Kubik lacks a single story line and contains faint echoes of many previous works. The clue to the principle of construction comes at the end, when Kataev writes: 'Не повесть, не роман, не очерк, не путевые заметки, а просто соло на фаготе с оркестром - так и передайте.' (9,536) Kataev here gives a musical analogy. His work is a bassoon concerto in which each separate incident has its own key and its own rhythm. For example, the opening section has a totally different musical sound to the closing one. Kataev had long been regarded as an expert judge of painting whose work could be compared to that of a painter like Marquet,¹ but in Kubik, while still revealing his painterly qualities, he gives more weight to the musical quality of his prose. The work is composed on the principle of counterpoint. It is highly significant that at one point Kataev quotes Mandel'shtam to whom he is indebted for much in Kubik, as saying: '"проза ассимметрична, ее движения - движения словесной массы - движение стада, сложное и ритмичное в своей неправильности; настоящая проза - разнбой, разлад, многоголосие, контрапункт..."' (9,483) In Kubik Kataev develops more fully than ever before the thoughts about the sound of prose which he had advanced in the article of 1953

1. See, for example, V. Kataev, 'Obnovlenie prozy', p. 125.

entitled 'Novogodnii tost'. Towards the beginning of Kubik he makes a distinction between intonation and sound.

Intonation is defined as:

запевка всей вещи, ее музыкальный ключ, ее тайная горечь: никто в эту ночь не спал в доме Болконских.

Sound, on the other hand, is something quite different:

В звуке содержится гораздо больше того, что мы улавливаем своим несовершенным слуховым аппаратом. Это всегда какая-то тайная информация, поток сигналов, как бы моделирующих звучащую вещь в мировом пространстве. Волшебный "эффект присутствия". (9,455)

And again:

Не может быть звука вне материи, породившей его, так же как не может быть сознания вне бытия. Звук - это сознания колеблющейся материи. (9,455)

As defined in these extracts, both intonation and sound play an important part in Kubik. Each of the major sections of the work is characterised by its own intonation, and formal division into chapters is replaced by skilful variations in pace and tone.¹ In general, Kataev does not switch suddenly and irrevocably from one section involving a given pace and tone, to another. Rather does he use a contrapuntal method of introducing a certain pace and tone in the middle of the previous section. Thus the entire work has a dynamism based on the musical method of the introduction of a melody which is fully developed only later. For example, the opening section is, for the most part, a simple narrative, written in relatively short paragraphs and with extensive use of dialogue. But in

1. In an article of 1971 Kataev suggested that each literary work should be composed in a specific key and that the author's first task was to find the appropriate key. See V. Kataev, 'Schast'e otkrytii', Literaturnaya gazeta, 20 January 1971.

the middle of this section Kataev introduces a long paragraph beginning 'Zasedanie - eto tozhe nechto material'noe' (9,455-6) which anticipates the theme and style of a later section, and which contrasts strikingly with the predominant tone of the surrounding passage.

Another feature of Kubik which may relate it to modern music is its lack of a formal beginning or ending. It begins and ends with three dots (in the latter case followed by the words 'no zachem?') and appears to be open-ended. Near the beginning of the work Kataev comments on its open-endedness and also introduces the important notion of sound:

История девочки Саньки и мальчика Пчелкина, которую я собираюсь здесь рассказать, как и все то, что происходит в мире, не имеет начала, а тем более конца, так что примем за точку отсчета тот характерный звук, который раздался на одной из четырех тенистых улиц дачной местности "Отрада" в начале этого века. (9,453)

7.5.4 Sound and the 'Effect of Presence'

If musical sound, or intonation, is important in Kubik, then non-musical sound is no less so. In the extract quoted above (p. 439) Kataev defined sound as consciousness of quivering matter and as 'a stream of signals which, as it were, shape the object giving off the sound in world space'. The author himself both gives off his own sound and receives sound signals from all around:

Я не пишу, не создаю музыку, не вижу, не слышу, не понимаю, - да и зачем? - я непрерывно звучу, как некий резонатор, волшебный прибор, принимающий отовсюду из мирового пространства миллионы миллиардов сигналов, с непостижимой скоростью несущихся в мое бедное тело, в мою нежную, такую хрупкую Психею. Все, кому не лень, посылают в мою Душу, в мой мозг свои сигналы, свои категорические приказы, как бы управляя мною на расстоянии:

все эти пульсары, туманности, астероиды, белые и красные карлики, солнечный ветер, магнитные поля, северные сияния, вся беззвучно гремущая вокруг меня бесконечная и безначальная Материя, весь этот космический "брамбахер". Они насылают на меня объемные сновидения, мучающие меня, как события подлинной жизни. (9,501)

Kataev goes on to speak of 'the magic "effect of presence"'. Sound in this meaning plays a most important part in Kubik, and for the development of his ideas on the subject Kataev is obviously greatly indebted to Mandel'shtam to whom he refers as 'The Exile'. Kataev quotes The Exile as saying:

"Разве вещь - хозяин слова?...Слово Психея.
Живое слово не обозначает предмета, а свободно
выбирает, как бы для жилья, ту или иную
предметную значимость, вещьность, милое тело.
И вокруг вещи слово блуждает свободно, как
душа вокруг брошенного, но не забытого тела."
(9,494)¹

Mandel'shtam's idea of a word being like a Psyche, i.e. a soul outside the body, resembles the image, used by Kataev in Trava zabven'ya, of rows of buddhas standing on a shelf waiting to be incarnated by the use of a word, or name. (9,269-70) It may also be significant that Poe's poem 'Ulalume', from which Kataev quoted in Svyatoi kolodets, contains a reference to Psyche. One of Mandel'shtam's poems of 1913 appears to link 'Ulalume' with the notion of the Psyche-word (slovo-Psikheya). The second stanza reads:

Я так и знал, кто здесь присутствовал незримо:
Кошмарный человек читает Улялюм.
Значение - суэта, и слово - только шум,
Когда фонетика - служанка серафима.²

Within Svyatoi kolodets the major significance of 'Ulalume' is

1. This quotation is from Mandel'shtam's essay 'Slovo i kul'tura' (1921). See O. Mandel'shtam, Sobranie sochinenii, vol. 2, pp. 264-9.
2. O. Mandel'shtam, 'My napryazhennogo molchan'ya ne vynosim', Sobranie sochinenii, vol. 1, p. 29.

undoubtedly in relation to the Russian widow and the poem's reference to Psyche correlates with Kataev's frequently expressed view that his soul left his body. However, it seems quite likely, in view of the frequent references to Mandel'shtam in Svyatoi Kolodets and later works, that the notion of the soul leaving the body and becoming temporarily incarnated in some other object is related to the notion of the Psyche-word and that the source of this idea is Mandel'shtam. If this is so, then Kataev's use of Poe's 'Ulalume' may also stem from Mandel'shtam.

As an example of a Psyche in Mandel'shtam's sense Kataev invents the word 'brambakher' and allows it to take on various meanings in accordance with Mandel'shtam's view that an object is not master of a word. 'Brambakher' pursues Kataev (and his characters Monsieur and Madame) throughout East Germany. The word is derived from the name of a small East German spa town - Bad Brambach - and one of its applications is to the mineral water from this town. (It is in this meaning that it is used at the end of the work when Monsieur, feeling unwell, sits down on a crate of German 'brambakher' mineral water.) (9,535) But as a Psyche the word is not restricted to one object, and Kataev uses it as a sound threatening war:

Вокруг какой вещи свободно блуждало это
мучительно привязавшееся к нам слово, как
бы нарочно созданное для того, чтобы
вселиться в грохот сражения, а потом
тревожно меститься в подавляющей мертвой
тишине внезапно заключенного перемирия?
(9,494)

Later, 'brambakher' is used to convey the sound of a wasp being crushed underfoot and the crash of Luther's inkwell

against the wall as he struggles against the Devil. Later still it is used to express a similar idea to one expressed in Svyatoi kolodets, namely that the author 'becomes' the various objects he is looking at. 'Brambakher' represents Kataev's soul, which enters into various people and objects, bringing them to life:

...и Психея брамбахера, покинув милое тело
Вагнера, уже металась по маленькому музею
старинных музыкальных инструментов, не в
состоянии сразу решить, куда бы ей вселиться
...Да мало ли куда каждую минуту порывалась
вселиться непоседливая Психея, ...Стихия
музыки, как предметная значимость, как некогда
брошенное милое тело, неодолимо влекла к себе
Психею. (9,502-3)

When the poet's Psyche-word settles in a body the result will be a metaphor, and in a few outstanding cases the 'effect of presence' will take place and the metaphor will be realised or materialised. It is precisely this magic 'effect of presence' which Kataev sees as the highest achievement of modern poetry. 'Эффект присутствия' - вот сокровенная суть подлинно современной поэзии.' (9,500) In the future, artists may be enabled to achieve even more astounding materialisation of their metaphors by means of scientific advances. Kataev quotes an article from Pravda about information-carrying lasers (holography) which may one day be capable of transporting and materialising images. He advises artists to prepare for this miracle by training themselves to think in images.

However, it is not necessary to await these scientific advances before experiencing the 'effect of presence'. Examples can be found in modern poetry and elsewhere. As a good example

of a metaphor becoming materialised as a legend Kataev cites the well-known story of Luther throwing an inkwell at the Devil. Mandel'shtam claimed that Luther was a poor philologist because he chose to throw an inkwell rather than a word.¹ But, in fact, Luther never threw an inkwell. His struggle with the Devil took the form of writing articles, and in that sense an inkwell was his weapon.

Это сразу же превратилась в легенду, которая облетела весь мир. Таким образом, игра слов сделалась метафорой, а метафора, в свою очередь, чуть ли не реализовалась в историческое событие, в театральную сцену с участием Черта, нечто весьма похожее на "эффект присутствия...". (9,498)²

7.5.5 The Wasp

Kataev illustrates the power of imagination to create similar legends in the story of the letters OV, and he attempts to achieve the 'effect of presence' in his description of the wasp. (9,496-8) On one level the section devoted to the struggle against the wasp is a brilliantly realistic piece of descriptive writing capturing the menace of the wasp and the fear of the man. But like many of the images in Svyatoi kolodets the wasp suggests another level; it is both realistic and symbolic. A clue to the possible significance of the wasp lies in the dream which the narrator has in the middle of the section. It is a dream about Stalin ('chelovek s uzкими

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1. O. Mandel'shtam, 'O prirode slova', Sobranie sochinenii, vol. 2, p. 292. Kataev alludes to this comment by Mandel'shtam on 9,498.
 2. It is interesting to compare these ideas with Olesha's many remarks about metaphors. Particularly important here is Olesha's story Lyubov' which is full of examples of the 'effect of presence'. One of the materialised metaphors which so troubles the hero of that story is a wasp which becomes a tiger because the hero thinks of it as such. Kataev's fight with the wasp in Kubik might well owe something to Olesha's story. See Yu. Olesha, Lyubov', Izbrannoe (M., 1974), pp. 196-202.

glazami ubiitsy') and it takes the form of a demonstration in Paris in which the crowd carry huge posters of Stalin, Mao-Tse-Tung ('tykvo-golovyi kitaets') and Napoleon (the famous portrait by Gros).¹ Suddenly the narrator is wakened from his dream by the wasp trying to get into his ear like a Psyche choosing as its temporary refuge his body. He jumps up, seizes the wasp and kills it. The sound of its body being crushed under his heel is:

...неповторимый звук, в котором как бы заключалась все: подбородок, крашенные усы, багровая индюшечья кожа его шеи, прищемленная стоячим воротником императорского мундирка, - и шелест темного яда, проникшего в мою кровь, заставившего мгновенно распахнуть мою руку... А полосатый комочек все еще катался на полу, и я еще раз раздавил его, надеюсь, на этот раз уже окончательно... (9,498)

Taken in conjunction with the dream about the narrow-eyed murderer, it seems a reasonable assumption that the man who suddenly, and apparently inexplicably, is conjured up by the sound of the wasp's body being crushed is Stalin and that the struggle with the wasp represents yet another attempt by Kataev (following those in Svyatoi kolodets) to excise from himself the spirit of Stalinism.

7.5.6 The Poodle

The principal character of the latter part of the tale, the black poodle Kubik, is created as the result of a similar process of metaphor realisation. The poodle in Goethe's Faust serves as a model, for he is an example of a metaphor

1. Towards the end of Kubik this dream becomes real as the poor waiter, Napoleon, becomes involved in the demonstrations of May 1968.

(he stands for Mephistopheles) becoming an object:

мы надеялись еще хоть раз увидеть легендарного
Доктора с не менее легендарной собакой, еще раз
доказавших мне могущество поэтической мысли,
превратившей метафору в предмет, в милое тело,
в вещь. (9,505)

In a passage which recalls the talking cat episode from Svyatoi kolodets, Kataev claims that his knowledge of poodles derives from the fact that he was once a spoilt little dog himself, although only for a short time. As with the talking cat, the reference here appears to be to the position of establishment writers during the Stalin era. The entire episode (9,506-8) can be read as an Aesopian account of the way in which writers became totally subservient to authority. Thus, the poodle begins as a metaphor, but such is the power of poetic thought (to use Kataev's own phrase) that he becomes realised as a character and takes part in the story with which Kubik ends.

Although the poodle becomes an important character in the story, Kataev frequently reminds the reader of his own role in the dog's creation. For example, he draws attention to the nature of creation by musing that Kubik may be an artificial dog:

Я склонен думать, что это была собака не
натуральная, а искусственная, созданная
человеческими руками, в лаборатории какого-
нибудь гениального экспериментатора-кибернетика
или бионика, сумевшего создать во времени и
пространстве искусственное существо. (9,511)

7.5.7 The Title of Kubik

The theme of the nature of artistic creativity is the central one in the work and it provides an explanation (or, rather, several possible explanations) of the enigmatic

title. Near the beginning of Kubik the author teasingly raises the question of why the work is so called:

Но почему, собственно, кубик? Потому что - шесть сторон в трех измерениях пространства и времени. А может быть, просто имя собачки. А верней всего, просто так. Захотелось. Что может быть лучше свободной воли! (9,463)

The link between a cube (six sides in three dimensions of space and time) and a dog cannot be perceived at this juncture of the work, but once the dog is introduced and described as 'an artificial creation in time and space' the choice of name becomes clearer. Moreover, there are several other references to cubes in the work which confirm the centrality of the theme of artistic creativity. The ability of the artist to immortalise something in his work is expressed in terms of the flash-cube used in a camera:

Он достал из кармана куртки маленький стеклянный кубик, укрепил его над видоискателем фотоаппарата и несколько раз щелкнул, вызвав в середине кубика с крошечным зеркальным рефлектором магневые вспышки, как бы вырвавшие из времени и пространства и навсегда сделавшие неподвижными золотой венец фракийской принцессы... (9,489)¹

A further reference to cubes appears to be a cryptic defence of the individuality of the artist in a modern technological age. This passage becomes particularly meaningful if it is remembered that at the end of the work Kataev called Kubik a 'bassoon solo'. The passage is about wooden cubes which are used to draughtproof window frames. The hotel was equipped with the latest technical devices but

1. It is worth noting that the photograph taken by the young French tourist does not turn out quite as he had hoped. The crown is hardly visible, and the clearest objects in the photograph are the holsters of the policemen guarding the treasure (who had been intended as incidental to the photograph). This appears to be a comment on the gap between an artist's intention and the finished work of art which has been determined by more factors than conscious intention.

it still had these old cubes: 'А серые деревянные кубики на веревочках не научились ничем заменить...А чем вы замените хорошее, выдержанное дерево скрипки, фagота?'

(9,522-3) Technological advance may aid the artist, but it will not replace the ability of the man who can think in images.

One final reference to a cube returns us to the question of the 'effect of presence'. Part of a Pravda report on holography reads: 'В одном кубическом сантиметре вещества, обладающего эффектом объемной фотографии (голографии), получаемой с помощью оптического луча, может содержаться столько же сведений, сколько в пяти миллионах книг.' (9,499) It may appear that such technical advances will render artists unnecessary, and that, therefore, the Pravda report runs counter to the defence of art undertaken in Kubik. However, on the same page as the Pravda report Kataev calls on artists to prepare for the day when a mass of information can be carried by a cubic centimetre of matter by concentrating their thoughts on images, by striving for 'the innermost essence of truly modern poetry'. Thus, the cubic centimetre, which represents the future achievement of information science, represents the present achievement of those poets like Mandel'shtam capable of bringing about 'the effect of presence'.

The various references to cubes throughout the work pertain to the question of the nature of artistic creativity, and, on close examination, a work which appears to have no overall theme can be seen to be about art, and particularly poetry. Although written in prose, Kubik is a tone poem about the nature of poetry.

7.5.8 Concluding Remarks

In several respects Kubik closely resembles Svyatoi kolodets. It contains at least one cryptic reference to the servile position of writers (above all Kataev himself) in the Stalin period; it reveals Kataev as a master of description and as very sensitive to the rhythm of prose. It raises questions about the nature of artistic creativity. Concerned as it is almost exclusively with aesthetic matters, Kubik demonstrates why Kataev was attracted all his life by such an aesthete as Bunin. It is fitting that Kataev's work of the 1960s, in which the place of pure artistry within the framework of Soviet society is closely examined, should end with Kubik, for the publication of that tale indicates that aestheticism is now tolerated. But the critical response to all of Kataev's works of the decade demonstrates that his approach to art does not go unchallenged.

7.6 The Critical Response to Kataev's Work of the 1960s

Reviewers of Malen'kaya zheleznaya dver' v stene for the most part welcomed the tale. Writing in Literaturnaya gazeta, Skorino stressed that the main theme was the importance of the October Revolution. Through Kataev's door into the past the reader can see the historical inevitability of the socialist revolution. While emphasising the importance of the revolutionary theme, Skorino does also draw attention to the richness of Kataev's prose style. 'Повесть Валентина Катаева богата красками и звучаниями. Она написана густо, ярко, чрезвычайно

пластично: портретные психологические детали точны, бытовые пейзажи почти осязаемы.¹

The response to Svyatoi kolodets and Trava zabven'ya was both more voluminous and more divided. Some critics and reviewers praised Kataev's tales in the most generous way. One review of Trava zabven'ya, for example, contained the following accolade: 'Это - современная классика. Сложная и простая. Неторопливая. Классика всегда нетороплива. Многослойная. Новаторская проза, она в то же время читается как традиционная.'²

Critics agreed that the quality of the writing in both works (what is frequently referred to in Russian as masterstvo) was very high. Pertsov wrote that the quality of the descriptive writing in Trava zabven'ya sometimes appeared little short of miraculous.³ But several reviewers followed V. Dudintsev in distinguishing between the formal excellence of Kataev's writing on the one hand and the lack of moral substance on the other.⁴ For Dudintsev, all of the brilliance of Kataev's writing in Svyatoi kolodets does not compensate for the lack of feeling, and, in particular, pain.⁵ A similar point of view was expressed in the most detailed article about Kataev's

1. L. Skorino, 'Dalekoe - blizkoe', Literaturnaya gazeta, 14 November 1964.

2. G. Kukharskii, 'Grani vremeni', Nedelya, 14 May 1967.

3. V. Pertsov, 'O novoi proze Valentina Kataeva', Literaturnaya Rossiya, 30 June 1967.

4. V. Dudintsev, 'Dve magii iskusstva', Literaturnaya gazeta, 13 August 1966.

5. It is difficult to agree with Dudintsev that Svyatoi kolodets lacks true feeling. Kataev's friend and protege Vasilii Aksenov sprung to his defence against Dudintsev (without naming the critic). Aksenov points out that only someone who failed to understand the narrator, and thereby the author of Svyatoi kolodets could possibly believe it to be a work devoid of feeling. See V. Aksenov, 'Puteshestvie k Kataevu', Yunost', 1967, No. 1, pp. 68-9.

'new' prose, B. Sarnov's 'Ugl' pylayushchii i kimval bryatsayushchii'.¹ The first part of the title refers to Kataev's use of Pushkin's 'Prorok'; the second part comes from I Corinthians 13, I ('Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.') Clearly, the very title reveals that Sarnov's intention resembles that of Dudintsev, namely to contrast Kataev's technical mastery with his lack of feeling or morality. The following paragraph is typical of the article as a whole:

Любое описание, любой словесный портрет становится художественным в тот момент, когда, соприкасаясь с предметом, художник не только рисует предмет, но и, говоря словами Белинского, изводит из своей внутренней глубины все те ощущения, которые пробудило в нем столкновение с предметом.²

Sarnov's article contains many insights into Svyatoi kolodets and Trava zabven'ya and it is persuasively written, but it judges Kataev by very harsh standards, and, although there is much truth in what Sarnov says, he appears to underestimate the degree of honest self-examination in both works.

Negative criticism of Kubik rested on the point made by Dudintsev and Sarnov, namely the futility of formal brilliance without substance. The question in the title of Smirnova's review 'No zachem?' is directed to this dilemma.³ Like Sarnov

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1. B. Sarnov, 'Ugl' pylayushchii i kimval bryatsayushchii', Voprosy literatury, 1968, No. 1, pp. 21-49. The same issue of Voprosy literatury contains two further articles about Kataev which are of less interest. V. Gusev, 'Dve storony medali', pp. 50-60; I. Grinberg, 'Nablyudatel'nost' ili litsezenie', pp. 61-77.
 2. B. Sarnov, 'Ugl' pylayushchii...', p. 47.
 3. V. Smirnova, 'No zachem?', Literaturnaya Rossiya, 11 July 1969.

she questions Kataev's morality, and is particularly disturbed by his identification with the capitalist hero, Monsieur.¹

In most of the negative reviews and articles about Kataev's work of the 1960s the high moral tone typical of much Soviet literary criticism can be heard. No critic disputes Kataev's talent or the quality of his writing. What is in dispute is the quality of his character. In a curious way one is reminded of Mashbits-Verov's article of 1930 which also admitted Kataev's talent but judged him to be a harmful influence in Soviet literature because of his lack of commitment to the Soviet system. Thus the wheel has come round full circle, and Kataev's work of the 1960s, together with the critical response aroused by it, can be compared to his work of the 1920s and the criticism which it provoked. On comparing these two periods one is struck by some great differences, but more striking still are the similarities. This question must form part of the conclusion to the present study.

1. For an interesting contrary opinion see G. Filippov, 'Po zakonom orkestra', *Zvezda*, 1969, No. 8, pp. 211-3. In direct contradiction of the views of Sarnov and Smirnova he writes: 'Но как бы то ни было, нельзя за каждой строкой не увидеть пристальный и честный глаз подлинного мастера, одинаково чувствующего и радость творческой силы, и боль от сознания неразрешимости многих противоречий, и мучительную ответственность перед людьми.'

CONCLUSION

The line of development of Kataev's long and diverse career has followed some of the major movements in Soviet literature. During the 1920s he wrote a small number of lyric poems in the style of Bunin; some lyrical and romantic short stories; two parodies of the popular genre of revolutionary/scientific novel; a satirical novel which laid some of the groundwork for Il'f and Petrov; a highly successful comic play; and scores of satirical sketches, similar to those being written by Bulgakov, Olesha, Il'f and Petrov and others.¹ In other words, during this decade he was a typical gifted Fellow Traveller, working with facility in a number of genres, and making no strong political point. At the most eclectic period of Soviet literature Kataev's work was at its most eclectic.

Two of his works of the 1920s - Rastratchiki and Kvadratura kruga - brought him great popularity, both in the Soviet Union and abroad, and the desire for further success and acclaim was undoubtedly one of the factors which impelled Kataev to change direction in the 1930s when a change was required of the Fellow Travellers. Other factors were the implied threat in Mashbits-Verov's critical article of 1930 and, probably, a desire to be a part of the new stage in Soviet

1. The satirical sketch Glav-polit-bogosluzhenie (2,301-3) is, in fact, by Bulgakov. The sketch was published in Gudok on 24 July 1924. The mistake over the identity of the author most likely arose because the sketch was signed with the initials M.G. (М.Г.), which was interpreted as standing for "Mitrofan Gorchitsa" - one of Kataev's pseudonyms - whereas it was a misprint for the similar M.B. (М.Б.) - "Mikhail Bulgakov".

society, the period of the first Five Year Plan. Kataev's three longest works of the 1930s reflect the development of Soviet literature in that decade. Firstly, Vremya, vpered! is one of the best of the 'construction novels' about the Five Year Plan; secondly, Beleet parus odinokii forms part of the movement towards both children's literature and historical novels in the middle of the decade; finally, Ya, syn trudovogo naroda is one of the works written towards the end of the 1930s in anticipation of the coming war.

During and after the Second World War the topicality of much of Kataev's work continued unabated. The difficulties which he experienced over Za vlast' Sovetov typified the almost impossible position of Soviet authors between the end of the War and the death of Stalin. In the Thaw period Kataev, himself, did not produce remarkable work. But his patronage of younger authors and his insistence in articles and public speeches on the artist's right to freedom of expression played an important part in Soviet literary life of the 1950s.

Kataev's work of the 1960s, too, has formed part of major trends in Soviet literature. Freed from the constraints of the previous era, many older authors turned now to memoirs of the repressive days of the recent past; a greater awareness of the rest of the world, particularly America, began to feature in a literature which had been almost entirely insular for decades; a degree of formal experimentation began to creep in to the work of several young poets; authors felt able to reveal more sophisticated tastes in the arts than previously. Kataev's

work of the 1960s reflects all of these trends.¹

It is difficult, faced with such a diverse career, to isolate the most important characteristics of Kataev's work. Yet, clearly, some attempt to do so must be made. It is instructive to begin by considering his limitations and to move on from there to his strengths. Kataev spent more than twenty years on his tetralogy, Volny Chernogo morya, and in purely quantitative terms it is his major work. Yet, despite the charm of Beleet parus odinokii and the partial success of Zimnii veter, the cycle as a whole must be regarded as an artistic failure. Principal among the reasons for this is Kataev's inability to create believable adult characters in an extended work. It is worth noting that the only successes among the adult figures of the tetralogy are based on Kataev himself or on his father; the purely imagined heroes remain stereotyped. Much more successful are those works where an inability to draw rounded portraits matters less - short stories, where character traits can be hinted at by means of physical details; the satirical novel Rastratchiki, in which grotesque characters form part of the author's conception; and Vremya, vpered!, in which exaggerated characters do not detract from the most important features of the novel - its atmosphere and pace.

A factor in the failure of the tetralogy which provides another clue to the limitations of Kataev's talent is his inability to convey a wide picture of the society in which his work is set. All four novels of Volny Chernogo morya move uncomfortably from

1. Only in the 1970s, a period beyond the scope of this dissertation, has Kataev's work seemed to be apart from the mainstream of Soviet literature.

the hero's private world to attempt a broad view of the age. The best pages of all the novels in the tetralogy deal with the purely individual concerns, and, in particular, the sensual awareness of the semi-autobiographical hero. In contrast to these sections, the depiction of war and revolution lacks specificity.

Kataev's outstanding strengths are his humour and his ability to recall and convey with precision the nature of physical objects and particular sensations, including unusual ones brought on by delirium. The former aspect of his talent has given rise to many humorous and satirical works and has aided the author greatly in his portrayal of children, which is generally excellent. In the 1920s and again in the 1960s Kataev allowed his two strengths to dominate in his work and these are undoubtedly his finest periods. The works of the 1960s are both more complex and less spontaneous than those of the earlier period, yet they are not entirely dissimilar, for the same elements come to the fore.

To a considerable extent Kataev's gifts are those of the lyric poet, and it is significant that in the 1960s he turned increasingly to the theme of poets and poetry. In Trava zabven'ya he explores the relationship between the poet - himself included - and society, and in Kubik he gives a subtle defence of the poet's magic. Yet, as he makes clear in Trava zabven'ya, Kataev is not content to be a lyric poet or a purely 'private' writer. To him, the 'public' side of the polarity which runs through Soviet literature has always exerted an attraction, for a variety of reasons which have been discussed

at several points in this dissertation. As a result, his work is marked by a tension between his 'private' and 'public' sides. In Trava zabven'ya he reveals how deep and intractable this problem is, and his apparent resolution of the problem (in the parable of the pillow) fails to convince.

Critical attitudes to Kataev have largely been determined by the dominance of one or other of these sides. In 1930 Mashbits-Verov fully acknowledged Kataev as a talented writer, but because his gifts were 'private' rather than 'public' the critic saw him as a threat in Soviet literature. Similarly, almost all the critics of Kataev's later works have admitted his technical mastery, his 'magic with words', but many have been dissatisfied with the application of his talent.

It is interesting to speculate, as Nadezhda Mandel'shtam has done, on what would have become of Kataev had he not felt the need to write 'like Walter Scott'.¹ Yet perhaps to do so is ultimately futile, for Kataev is as incapable of shaking off his 'public' side as he is of shaking off his 'private' side. His inherent aestheticism has been held in check by a need for public recognition and, in later years at any rate, by a commitment to his country and its political system.

1. N. Mandel'shtam, Vospominaniya, p. 299.

APPENDIX

The appendix consists of a photocopy of the manuscript of a poem by Kataev dated 9 May 1919. It was written on the occasion of the presentation of a magnifying glass to Bunin by Kataev and consists of mock-heroic verses suitable for the occasion.

In Trava zabven'ya Kataev recalls giving the glass to Bunin and quotes a slightly different version of the poem. (9,329) It is interesting to note that in the manuscript Kataev aligns himself with Bunin by the use of the words 'nam' and 'my' in the second stanza, whereas in Trava zabven'ya he uses 'Vam' and 'Vy'. Also interesting is the fact that the reference to the Revolution in the version quoted on 9,329 does not occur in the manuscript given to Bunin.

Прилигед метя, уригив,
 Сие вошебное елика,
 Вово свед, в евою обител
 Фивотворзущее гетно,
 Наперенор еуровз упрз май,
 Микур тилегий вонур,
 Вий солнуах б зашитаи примо
 Табам дурунгоих паниур!

Госем, средь востекой уревони
 И уривени в правах,
 Вуни мотески боти
 Емз уазили в кебесах,
 Но вай, бамладаеице нбу,
 Наеата егери ботани...
 Довасно мот елирими фреду,
 Оуекей - и фред пасмурей нам!

накешитикайбоса?

9 мая 919.

Одесса.

Валентин.

Гамасе

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